About the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program (WACCPP)

The WACCPP was established in 1992 as part of the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP). The WACCPP aims to reduce the number of new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed (incidence) as well as deaths (mortality) from cervical cancer among WA women. In WA for the years 2004-2013, the incidence of cervical cancer in Aboriginal women was more than twice that of non-Aboriginal women, and mortality of Aboriginal women was greater than 5 times the non-Aboriginal rate.

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable of all cancers. The greatest risk factor for cervical cancer is not participating in regular cervical screening.

To improve Aboriginal women’s awareness of the importance of regular cervical screening and increase their participation in screening:

- Allow time for discussion and questions
- Let participants know that any question is important and can be safely asked (no question is silly)
- Have cervical screening equipment and supplies available for women to see and handle
- Encourage participants to ask questions and be involved in the discussion
- Provide information on how the screening test is done and what happens after
- Identify and discuss local barriers to cervical screening
- Provide follow-up information on how to get more information

The WACCPP can provide a number of supporting resources to be used in the delivery of cervical screening information. Please contact the WACCPP at cervicalscreening@health.wa.gov.au

“KNOWLEDGE IS HOPE, INTO THE FUTURE”

Women living in WA, come together to talk and become more aware of how to prevent cervical cancer. They see this message being very important to all the women and their families in the communities. As they travel back to their communities they talk about how to spread the message so that other women know the importance of having regular cervical screening. Sadly the empty space is from the women who have since died from cervical cancer because they didn’t have regular cervical screening.

The woman is dancing because the human papillomavirus (HPV), which caused her abnormal cervical cell changes, was found early. If she didn’t have regular screening, and left the abnormal cells untreated, it may have led to cervical cancer.

By Nerolie Bynder-Blurton

Where is the cervix?

The cervix joins the top of the vagina and the lower part of the uterus (the womb). This is the area the midwife or doctor checks when a woman is in labour to monitor how the labour is progressing (i.e. number of centimetres dilated).
What is cervical cancer?

Our bodies are made up of billions of cells which grow and divide in a set, well-ordered way. If these cells grow and divide in an ‘out of control’ abnormal way they can turn into cancer.

Cancer causes damage to healthy cells and can also spread to other parts of the body. This causes people to become sick and when left untreated may lead to death.

Cervical cancer is one type of cancer that can develop in the cervix when abnormal cell changes are not found early and, if needed, treated. If these abnormal cells are left they may, over many years, turn into cancer. This may lead to death.

What is the human papillomavirus (HPV)?

The human papillomavirus, also known as HPV, is a very common infection: most people (eight out of ten) will have this virus at some time in their lives.

Both males and females can have HPV.

Most people do not know that they have HPV as there is often no symptoms and usually the body’s immune system clears the virus within one to two years.

Hundreds of types of HPV exist. Different HPV types affect different areas of the body including the cervix.

What causes cervical cancer?

The main cause of cervical cancer is HPV.

Anyone who has ever had sexual contact can have HPV. HPV that affects the cervix and the genitals is spread through any sexual contact.

There are many types of HPV that can infect the genital area:

• Some types generally do not cause cervical cancer but may cause genital warts
• Some types may cause cervical cancer.

The HPV virus can be cleared by the body itself OR cause changes in the cells of the cervix, which if not monitored and, if needed, treated may over time lead to cervical cancer.
How to prevent cervical cancer

The best way to prevent cervical cancer is to have regular cervical screening and, if appropriate, to have the HPV vaccination.

Women should have a Cervical Screening Test every five years and attend all follow-up and specialist appointments, as recommended.

Young women can also be vaccinated against certain types of HPV that are commonly linked with the development of cervical cancer, to help protect themselves.

Women who are HPV vaccinated also need to have regular cervical screening as the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

Regular cervical screening

HPV vaccination

The HPV vaccine

The HPV vaccine can protect against infection from types of HPV that cause many cases of cervical cancer and genital warts. The vaccine is most effective if given before first sexual contact.

The HPV vaccine is available as part of the National Immunisation Program for all 12-13 year old boys and girls. For these young people, the vaccine is provided free of charge at school or through a healthcare provider. It is important to encourage young people to have all required doses of the vaccine.

One of the reasons boys are vaccinated is to help prevent the virus from spreading to future sexual partners.

The HPV vaccine is also available to older girls/women through healthcare providers, but is best given before first sexual contact. There may be a fee for the vaccine for older girls/women.

As the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer, women who have had the HPV vaccine also need to have regular cervical screening.

For more information about the HPV vaccine please contact the Immunise Australia Program. www.immunise.health.gov.au

*Discuss the importance of encouraging young people to have all required doses of the vaccine.

Why is regular cervical screening important?

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.

The biggest risk factor for cervical cancer is not having regular Cervical Screening Tests.

Through regular cervical screening, HPV and any abnormal cell changes the virus may cause can be found. These cell changes can then be monitored and, if needed, treated to prevent the potential development of cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer often has no symptoms.

Cervical cancer can take up to 10 - 15 years to develop. The best protection against cervical cancer is having regular cervical screening.
Who should have cervical screening?

All women aged 25-74 years should have regular cervical screening. This includes:

- Women who feel well and have no symptoms
- Women who are pregnant
- Women who have been HPV vaccinated
- Women who have not had sexual contact for a long time
- Women who have had only one sexual partner
- Lesbian or bisexual women
- Transgender persons with an intact cervix
- Women who no longer have periods

Women who have had a hysterectomy and are unsure whether they still need to screen should talk to their healthcare provider.

Women with symptoms, such as unusual pain or bleeding, should see their healthcare provider immediately. These women can have a cervical test at any age.

How is a Cervical Screening Test done?

The Cervical Screening Test is taken by a healthcare provider.

You will be asked to undress from the waist down, and to lie on a bed in a private room. You will be given a sheet to cover yourself so you feel more comfortable.

The healthcare provider will place an instrument called a speculum into your vagina so that they can see your cervix and then will use a small brush to collect a sample of your cervical cells.

The healthcare provider will place the cells from the brush into a vial, label it with your name and details and send it to the laboratory for testing.

Please know that a Cervical Screening Test may be uncomfortable, but should not hurt. If you have any pain during the procedure you should let your healthcare provider know. You can ask the healthcare provider to stop at any time.

What happens next?

The sample of cervical cells collected by your healthcare provider is sent to the laboratory for testing.

The sample is tested for HPV and if HPV is found, then the same sample will be re-tested to look at the cervical cells, to see if any are abnormal.

Once the sample has been tested the results will be sent back to your healthcare provider, usually within two weeks.

Contact your healthcare provider to discuss your test results and to find out if you need to return sooner than five years.

Your test results will also be sent to the Cervical Screening Register, a confidential database of all cervical tests taken.

The Register notifies women when they are due and if they become overdue for their Cervical Screening Test.

If you do not wish for your test results to be sent to the Register please tell your healthcare provider.
Test results
Make sure you get your test results from your healthcare provider, usually available in about two weeks.

If you have HPV, your test results will also tell you if any abnormal cervical cells were found.

Based on these results, your healthcare provider will tell you when you should have your next Cervical Screening Test or if you need further testing. It is important that you attend all follow-up and specialist appointments.

If your Cervical Screening Test shows HPV, remember:
- HPV is very common.
- Most HPV infections will be cleared by the body itself within one to two years.

If your test results show HPV and abnormal cervical cells, remember:
- This doesn’t mean you have cervical cancer, but you will need more testing and maybe treatment.

Where can women have a Cervical Screening Test?
Services that offer cervical screening may include:
- Aboriginal Medical Service
- GP surgery
- Women’s health centre
- Community health centre

*Discuss with group the available services in your community.

Potential barriers
*Discuss what may prevent women from having a Cervical Screening Test.
*Discuss how women may overcome these barriers.

Some of these issues are barriers for many women:
- Lack of time
- Cost
- History of sexual abuse and/or assault
- Jealousy
- Lack of transport
- No one to look after kids
- Putting the health needs of their partner/children before their own
- No suitable healthcare provider/service
- Confidentiality concerns
- Feeling embarrassed of their bodies
- Shame
- Fear

Test results
Make sure you:
- Get your test results from your healthcare provider, usually available in about two weeks
- Understand your test results – ask questions
- Return for follow-up when recommended.

Potential barriers
What to remember

- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.
- A Cervical Screening Test is for HPV, not cervical cancer.
- Have a Cervical Screening Test every five years unless your healthcare provider tells you to come in earlier.
- Attend all follow-up appointments when recommended.
- Encourage young people to have all required doses of the HPV vaccine.
- Encourage all women in your family and community to have regular cervical screening.

About the artist: Nerolie Bynder-Blurton

Nerolie Bynder-Blurton is a proud Badimia, Yamatji and Nyoongar woman who was born in Three Springs, WA. Being an Aboriginal woman, mother, grandmother, daughter and sister, Nerolie is very much involved in women’s health.

Nerolie uses her art as a therapy and her inspiration comes from her life journey, her family, her role models and her mother’s artistic outlook. Nerolie has been involved in all forms of art from a young age and is the Aboriginal Artist in Residency at The University of Western Australia (UWA) since 2017. She was an recipient of the NAB 2017 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Art Award. Nerolie has completed many other beautiful works for people to enjoy.

About the illustrator: Kristie Taylor

Kristie Taylor is an Indigenous woman from Perth, WA. Drawing children is one of my passions for the benefits it brings t my young daughter who is starting school, and an emerging artist herself. In 2009, Kristie completed her first exhibition, which received great success.

In 2009, Kristie created designs for the Department of Housing’s NAIDOC celebrations, which showcased her versatility and raw talent. Kristie’s love of art is drawing children as they capture the innocence of life in their eyes and the elderly for the wisdom portrayed through their eyes.

About the graphic designer: Jilalga Murray

Jilalga Murray is a visual artist, graphic artist and public artist. She lives in Perth and runs her own small business, Jilalga Designs. Jilalga is a visual artist, graphic artist and public artist. She has designed and created many beautiful works for people to enjoy. Jilalga’s works are contemporary, bold and colourful. Jilalga has done design work for the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Fortescue Metals Group and the Department of Health. Jilalga’s works have been displayed in many public spaces across Western Australia.

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