

Cervical Cancer Screening Program Changes

From December 1st 2017, the Pap smear is now called Cervical Screening Test (CST). A number of changes have taken place due to new knowledge and improved technology. This means cervical cancer can be found sooner. The new test is searching for the presence of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) rather than searching for changes in the cells that occur because of the virus. (HPV causes 99% of all cervical cancer). The new test is more accurate and can detect problems earlier.

Having a cervical screening test/HPV test feels no different than having a Pap test. It is what happens to the sample after it has been taken that has changed.

New Age guidelines

Cervical screening test will now start at age 25 and continue until age 75. Women will only need to have the cervical screening test every five years.

How do you know if you need a Cervical Screening Test?

Anyone with a cervix who has ever been sexually active with a man or a woman and is over the aged 25 or older should have routine CSTs.

For routine testing your CST will be due 2 years after your last Pap test for example:

- ☑ If you have a Pap smear test before 1/12/17 and it is normal, your next test will be due in 2 years.
- ☑ If you have your Test after 1/12/17, it will be the new CST and your next test will be in 5 years if the result is normal

If you have never had a Pap test your first CST will be due at age 25.

If you have any symptoms of abnormal bleeding, no matter how old you are, it is important to see a Doctor or Nurse regardless of when your last pap/CST was.

What happens if I have a positive test?

If your CST is positive for any high-risk types of HPV (the types most likely to cause cervical cancer) the laboratory will automatically carry out a second test to look for changes in the cells of the cervix (liquid based cytology). This second test is also part of the CST. Your doctor or nurse will explain what you need to do next if you have a positive CST. Some people may need more frequent CST and others may need additional tests straight away.

If your CST is positive for HPV-16 or HPV-18 you will be referred for an examination called a colposcopy - a close examination of the cervix under magnification. If any cell changes are found, a sample of tissue (biopsy) can be taken from the cervix for further examination.

Reminder letters

There is now a new nationwide register and they will send out reminder letters when your CST is due.

At FPWNT we will contact you with your result has per normal and let you know when you need to have your next CST.

Reducing your risk of cervical cancer

There are two important things to do to reduce the chance of getting cervical cancer, the first is have the Gardasil injection at school and the other is have a Cervical Screening Test (CST). Additionally, male and female condoms and dams provide some protection from HPV and are important to protect you against other STIs. The Gardasil vaccination is given to all Australian girls and boys between ages of 12 to 14 years. Gardasil vaccination protects you against the highest risk HPV strains. If you have missed out on the Gardasil school vaccination program, discuss vaccination with your Doctor.

Can I do the test myself?

In the new program a self-collected CST will be possible for some women - it still needs to be done in the clinic and cannot be done at home. However, this self-collected CST test is currently not available.

Is it safe for me to wait until 25 for my first test?

Yes. It's safe to have your first CST at the age of 25 years. This is because:

- Cervical cancer is very rare in young women
- Young women are protected by the HPV vaccine
 - The National HPV Vaccination Program is reducing the rates of HPV infection and cervical pre-cancers
 - Its effect will continue to increase as more young people are vaccinated
- HPV infection is common in young sexually active women and usually clears up by itself
- The cervical screening program has not shown a difference in the detection of cervical cancers for women under 25.

You should always see your doctor if you have any unusual pain or bleeding from the vagina, such as bleeding after sex, bleeding in between your periods or bleeding after menopause. This may be a sign of abnormal cells on the cervix.

If you have had any sexual activity before 14 years of age, you can ask your doctor or nurse about having a CST before the age of 25.

For more information

- National Cervical Screening Program - <http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/internet/screening/publishing.nsf/Content/cervical-screening-1>
 - National Relay Service (for deaf people) - 13 36 77
 - TIS National's immediate interpreting service - 131 450
 - Contact Family Planning Welfare NT – 08 89480144 Website www.fpwnt.com.au
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