



Is Cervical Cancer Screening Right for You?

Cervical cancer screening (Pap test) is a test that can find abnormal cells in the cervix before they become cancer.

If these abnormal cells are found and treated early, cervical cancer can be stopped from developing.

Screening can also identify cancer at an early stage — before it can cause symptoms. If cervical cancer is caught at its earliest stage, the chance of survival is more than 85 per cent.

Cervical cancer usually has no symptoms. Symptoms of cervical cancer may include:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding (such as bleeding in between periods, bleeding during/after sex or after menopause).
- Abnormal or persistent vaginal discharge.
- Pelvic pain, or pain during sexual intercourse.

If you experience any of these symptoms, see your doctor.

What causes cervical cancer?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection causes almost all cervical cancers. HPV can take more than ten years to progress to pre-cancerous cells or cervical cancer.

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a virus that usually clears up on its own without causing any problems.

Two groups of HPV can infect the cervix — low risk and high risk. Low risk types are not associated with cervical cancer but may cause genital warts and abnormal screening results. Long term infection with a high risk type of HPV may lead to cervical cancer or pre-cancerous cells.

HPV is very common and easily spread through any kind of sexual contact. This includes intimate touching, oral, vaginal and anal sex.

Most people will get HPV at some point in their lives — often without knowing it. Usually the body's immune system removes the virus within two years. But sometimes HPV does not clear on its own, and over time, it can cause the cells of the cervix to become abnormal.

Who should get cervical cancer screening?

Women between the ages of 25 and 69 should be screened every three years. Screening can stop at age 69 if your results have always been normal. Ask your doctor if you should still be tested.

You should still screen regularly for cervical cancer if:

- You've been through menopause;
- You've had only one sexual partner or have been with the same partner for a while;
- You've had the HPV vaccine;
- You're in a same-sex relationship; or,
- You're a transgender individual with a cervix.

What happens during a cervical cancer screening?

Cervical cancer screening is a test, also known as a Pap test.

An instrument called a speculum is gently inserted in the vagina so the doctor can see your cervix. The doctor will then collect some cells from your cervix using a small brush or spatula.

Cervical cancer screening is not usually painful, but can be uncomfortable.

What You Should Know



How do I get screened?

Cervical cancer screening can be done by a doctor, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, midwife or naturopathic doctor at their office or clinic.

The test is free and only takes a few minutes of your time.

An abnormal screening result does not mean you have cancer.

An abnormal cervical cancer screening result means that cells have been found on your cervix that do not look normal. Abnormal results are common and do not mean that you have cancer or pre-cancerous cells.

Often these abnormal cells return to normal by themselves. But, in some cases, they may not return to normal on their own, and instead become pre-cancerous cells that need to be removed to prevent cancer from developing.

You need to discuss your results and the need for further tests or treatment with your doctor. It is important that you attend all follow-up appointments.

How can I reduce my risk of getting cervical cancer?

Anyone with a cervix can take two steps to prevent cervical cancer — get screened every three years and get the HPV vaccine if they are between the ages of 9 and 45. The HPV vaccine is provided free to girls in Grade 6 in BC. Girls and young women born in 1994 or later who missed getting the HPV vaccine may contact their health care provider to get immunized at no cost.

The vaccine protects against types of HPV that cause most cases of cervical cancer. If you have received the vaccine,

you still need to be screened, as the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer. To learn more about the HPV vaccine visit www.immunizebc.ca

Things to consider:

- No screening test is perfect. Even under the best conditions, there are some cases where cervical cancer screening results may indicate a cervical abnormality when there are no abnormal cells (false-positive) or the test results may be normal when there are pre-cancerous cells or cervical cancer present (false-negative).
- Screening is not effective in younger women. In women under age 25, most of the cervical abnormalities identified through screening usually resolve on their own within about 2 years. But if screened, this would result in unnecessary follow-up/treatment, which can lead to unnecessary anxiety and distress, or long-term consequences for future pregnancy (pre-term birth of low birth weight).
- If you have any symptoms of cervical cancer, please talk to your doctor. It is important to monitor your health and be aware of any unusual changes -- even if you recently had a normal cervical cancer screening. Symptoms of cervical cancer include abnormal vaginal bleeding (such as bleeding between periods, bleeding during/after sex or after menopause), abnormal or persistent vaginal discharge, pelvic pain, or pain during sexual intercourse.

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