

CYTOLOGY FIXATIVES: Frequently Asked Questions

Q) *Who supplies the fixative?*

A) Unfortunately, the BCCA is not able to provide fixative supplies to the smear-takers of BC. Ethanol based fixatives are best obtained from your regular medical supply distributor. The cost is about \$6.00 for a container of Pap fixative, which should be adequate for at least 200 slides.

Q) *Should I use a specific brand of fixative?*

A) There are several brands available, and they are all effective. There is no difference between brands, as long as it is a cytology fixative.

Q) *How are the smears applied now that we are to use the fixative?*

A) Please review the **Technique for Obtaining Cervical Smears** (updated version on the CCSP website, www.bccancer.bc.ca/PPI/Screening/Cervical/professionals.htm). An old version of this document was provided to healthcare providers as a laminated card, and **an updated laminated card will be send out once available.**

Q) *Do I have to stop doing Pap smears until I can acquire the fixative?*

A) No, we ask that you order the fixative as soon as possible and continue your current practices *until* you receive your order, at which point, please begin to use the fixative. In the interim we will continue to report results on unfixed material.

Q) *Am I required to use a fixative spray – couldn't I use alcohol instead? In the "old days", we used hair spray.*

A) Unfortunately, the use of alcohol does not guarantee against cross-contamination. Please use one of the commercially available cytology fixatives.

Q) *Although your letter indicated that there would be relevant information on your website, I have not found any clear answers to my questions, and in fact, some of the information there seems contradictory.*

A) We were in the process of updating our website and apologize for any confusion. We hope the Technique for Obtaining Cervical Smears laminated card will provide the information you require. The Office Manual for Health Professionals is now updated.

Q) *Why the change to fixation for all Pap test samples?*

A) Although re-hydration of air-dried Pap smears produces smears of satisfactory quality, we are switching to the standard practice of fixed Pap smears to better comply with international standards.