

Do you still need to have a Pap Smear after menopause?

Yes, the risk of getting cervical cancer increases with age so it is important to keep having Pap Smears every two years, even after menopause.

Should you have a Pap Smear if you have had a hysterectomy?

If your hysterectomy was only partial, and your cervix was not removed, you will still need to have a Pap Smear every two years. If you have had a total hysterectomy, that is, your uterus and cervix have been removed, you may still need to have a Pap Smear. Check with your doctor to be absolutely sure.

Remember the best protection against cervical cancer is to have a Pap Smear every two years

Talk to your GP about having a Pap Smear at your next appointment.

Practice details:

Information has been obtained from

Department of Health and Ageing Website

www.health.gov.au

Medicare Benefits Schedule



Why Should I Have A Pap Smear?

Patient Information Sheet



What is a Pap Smear?

A Pap Smear is a simple test for women to make sure the cervix is healthy. Your cervix is the opening of the uterus and is at the top of your vagina. A GP or suitably qualified nurse can easily perform the Pap Smear in a few minutes. Having a Pap Smear should be done every two years and is the best protection against cervical cancer.

When should I start having Pap smears?

All women who have ever had sex should start having Pap Smears between the ages of 18 and 70 years, or two years after first having sex, whichever is later. This includes male to female, and female to female sex.

Why have a Pap Smear?

A Pap Smear can show the early warning signs of cancer of the cervix. Sometimes the cells of the cervix change from healthy to unhealthy (abnormal). A Pap Smear can find abnormal cells before cancer develops.

This is what you should expect.

The GP will ask you to undress from the waist down and ask you to lie on your back or side for the examination. Sometimes they will request you lie on your side. You can ask for a female GP if that makes you feel more comfortable. The GP will use a speculum (medical instrument) to open your vagina so the cervix can be seen more clearly.

Some cells are gently wiped from the cervix with a small brush or spatula (a small plastic or wooden stick). The cells are placed on a glass slide and sent to a laboratory where they are looked at under a microscope for abnormalities.

What causes cervical cancer?

An infection with a virus called HPV (human papillomavirus) is the cause of almost all cervical cancers. There are over 100 different types of HPV. Two of these types are known to cause most of the cervical cancer cases in Australia.

HPV is very common. Most people (four out of five) will have HPV sometimes in their lives. Anyone who has ever had sex can have HPV.

In most cases HPV clears up by itself in a few years. Sometimes the virus can stay in your body longer, and can lead to cervical cancer. This usually takes a long time – about 10 years.

MOST RESULTS ARE NORMAL!

What if my results are not normal?

If your results are not normal this doesn't mean you have cancer. Very often it will be that you have an infection that will clear up naturally.

Some women need to have a Pap Smear more frequently and some abnormal cells will need to be treated by a specialist.

Make sure you talk to your doctor or nurse about what is best for you.

Who is at risk?

The risk of developing cervical cancer increases with age. All women with a cervix who have ever had sex at some time in their life are at risk of cervical cancer. About half the new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed each year are in women over 50 years of age. Women in this age group are less likely than younger women to have regular Pap Smears. More women over 50 years of age die from cervical cancer because their cancer is diagnosed later when treatment is more difficult.

What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

In the early stages of cervical cancer, there are usually no symptoms. The only way to detect changes is if you have a Pap Smear.

If you have any abnormal vaginal bleeding (such as intermittent bleeding, bleeding after sex or after menopause), abnormal or persistent vaginal discharge (bloody or offensive), or pelvic pain, you should see your GP.

How much does a Pap Smear cost?

Two costs are involved—the doctor's consultation fee and the Pap Smear pathology test. Some GP's bulk bill and there is no out of pocket fee. If a fee is charged Medicare will pay for some of the consultation fee and some of the pathology fee. It's best to ask the cost when making your appointment.