

LOW AND NO-COST CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING AND DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

A pelvic examination and Pap test are important parts of a woman's routine health care; they can detect abnormalities that may lead to cervical cancer. These abnormalities can be treated more successfully before cancer develops or if cancer is found early. Death from cervical cancer is almost always avoidable when detected early. During a pelvic exam and Pap test, a patient should always be accompanied by a female nurse or medical assistant. The patient has the right to request a female provider. Ask questions of the providers you seek and be an active part of your care.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PELVIC EXAMINATIONS AND PAP TESTS

Q. *What is a pelvic examination?*

A. In a pelvic examination, the vagina, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, bladder and rectum are felt by a healthcare provider to find any atypical changes in their size or shape. During a pelvic examination, the vagina is widened through the use of an instrument called a speculum in order to see the upper portion of the vagina and cervix.

Q. *What is a Pap test?*

A. Also known as a Pap smear, this is a way to examine cells collected from the cervix (the lower segment of the uterus). It can show the presence of infection, inflammation, abnormal cells and/or cancer.

Q. *How is a Pap test done?*

A. The Pap test is performed by a physician, advanced practice nurse, or physician assistant. The woman will be lying down on the examination table with her knees bent and her feet supported by stirrups. An instrument called a speculum is placed in the vagina and opened, exposing the cervix. The cells are collected from the cervix using a small brush or wooden spatula. These cells are then placed on a slide or in liquid media, and sent to a laboratory for analysis. The exam may cause slight discomfort and spotting afterwards.

Q. *When should I start having Pap tests?*

- A. Approximately three years after the onset of vaginal intercourse, or by age 21, whichever comes first.

Q. *When should a Pap test be done?*

- A. This test should not be done when a woman is menstruating; the best time is approximately 10-20 days after the first day of the menstrual period. You should avoid sexual intercourse, douching, or the use of vaginal medicines, gels, foams or creams, except as directed by your clinician, for 48 hours prior to the examination. These may wash away abnormal cells.

Q. *How often should I have a Pap test?*

- A. A Pap test should be done once a year. After age 30, if you have had three consecutive normal tests, your clinician may decide to do further Pap tests once every two to three years (barring certain risk factors such as HIV, immunosuppression, or DES [diethylstilbestrol] exposure).

Q. *Can I afford a Pap test?*

- A. Most insurance companies pay for Pap tests, and there are many low- and no-cost programs available. Medicare pays for annual Pap tests for Medicare insured women who are at a high risk for cervical or vaginal cancer and/or who have had an abnormal Pap test in the preceding 36 months. Medicare covers regular screening Pap tests and pelvic examinations every two years. For more information about Medicare coverage visit the website at www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Q. *What are the risk factors for cervical cancer?*

- A. Not having regular Pap tests, which can detect abnormalities before they are cancerous; infection with human papilloma virus (HPV); sexual intercourse before age 16; history of multiple sexual partners, or history of a partner with multiple partners; smoking; and HIV infection.

Q. *What is the human papilloma virus (HPV)?*

A. There are over 50 different types of HPV, a virus most commonly known to cause warts on the hands and feet. Other types infect the genital tract. Genital HPV types are sexually transmitted and cause external genital warts or cause cell changes on the cervix that increase a women's risk for cervical cancer. Most HPV infections do not result in genital warts or cervical disease. In most cases a healthy immune system will suppress or clear the virus.

Q. *Is there a test for the human papilloma virus (HPV)?*

A. Yes, there is an HPV test. The HPV test can be done at the same time as the Pap test, with the same swab or a second swab. You will not notice a difference in your exam if you have both tests done. The HPV test can detect if you have the types of HPV that are linked to cervical cancer.

Q. *When should I be tested for HPV?*

A. If you are age 30 or older, you can have an HPV test with your Pap test as part of your normal health visit. Talk to your doctor or nurse about having the test. You also may want to ask about the cost and whether your insurance will cover it.

Q. *I am under age 30. Should I have an HPV test and a Pap test?*

A. Women under 30 should not get the HPV test with the Pap test as part of their normal health visit. HPV is so common in women younger than 30 that it would not be helpful to test for it. After age 30, HPV is much less common.

However, if you are under 30 and your Pap test results are abnormal your doctor may want to do an HPV test. This is not the same as getting the HPV test with a routine Pap test.

LOW & NO-COST CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING RESOURCES AND DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Cancer Detection Programs: Every Woman Counts..... 800-511-2300

www.dhs.ca.gov/cancerdetection

Part of the California Department of Public Health, Cancer Detection Section, this program helps underserved women receive free breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services. To qualify for cervical services, a woman must meet 3 criteria: age of 25 years or older, income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, and either uninsured or underinsured. Operators provide referrals to local clinics and speak English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese. Please note that you **must** request cervical services when calling the 800 number, as not all facilities have funding for both breast and cervical screening.

Family PACT..... 800-942-1054

www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/FamilyPact/Pages/default.aspx

Women enrolled in the Family Planning Access, Care and Treatment program are eligible for annual examinations that include a breast and pelvic exam, Pap test, testing for sexually transmitted infections, and contraception. Women who are uninsured or underinsured with an income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level qualify if they are able to reproduce. Coverage is from the age of menarche, or the onset of menstruation, to age 55 (please note that the woman must be able to reproduce; if a woman had had surgical sterilization, such as a tubal ligation, she will no longer qualify for the program).

LOW & NO-COST CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING AND DIAGNOSTIC REFERRALS

American Cancer Society800-ACS-2345

www.cancer.org

(800-227-2345)

Cancer Information Services

of the National Cancer Institute800-4-CANCER

www.cancer.gov

(800-422-6237)

National Cervical Cancer Coalition..... 800-685-5531

www.nccc-online.org

LOW AND NO-COST CERVICAL CANCER TREATMENT RESOURCES

Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Program 800-824-0088

www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Pages/BCCTP.aspx

BCCTP will immediately provide full scope Medi-Cal or limited time cancer related Medi-Cal for uninsured or underinsured California residents who have been screened and diagnosed with breast and/or cervical cancer. An applicant can be enrolled via the internet by providers who offer services under the Family Planning Access Care and Treatment program (Family PACT) and/or Cancer Detection Programs: Every Woman Counts. Please note that California residency has nothing to do with immigration status and that enrolling in the BCCTP does not make the individual a public charge.

Individuals diagnosed with breast and/or cervical cancer can reach a BCCTP Eligibility Specialist by calling 1-800-257-6900.