

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. Ask questions of the providers you seek and be an active part of your care.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PELVIC EXAMS, PAP TESTS AND HPV

Q. *What is a pelvic examination?*

A. In a pelvic examination, the vagina, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, bladder and rectum are inspected or 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. Cells are collected from the cervix using a small brush and spatula. These cells are then placed on a slide or in liquid media, and sent to a laboratory for analysis.

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.

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

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

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. See the following section for low and no cost screening resources.

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

- A.** The most important risk factor for cervical cancer is infection by the human papillomavirus (HPV). Other risk factors include not having regular pap tests, smoking, HIV infection, history of multiple sexual partners and having sexual intercourse before the age of 16.

Q. *What is the human papillomavirus (HPV)?*

- A.** There are over 100 different types of HPV, a virus most commonly known to cause warts on the hands and feet. Some types infect the genital tract. Genital HPV types are sexually transmitted and can cause external genital warts or cell changes on the cervix that increase a woman's risk for cervical cancer. Many women become infected with HPV, but very few will ever develop cervical cancer. In most cases the body's immune system will fight off the virus and the infection will go away without any treatment. For reasons we don't yet understand, in some women the infection persists and can cause cervical cancer.

Q. *Is there a test for the human papillomavirus (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. *Who should be tested for HPV?*

A. Women over 30 may have an HPV test done at the same time as the Pap test. If both results are normal, a woman has a very low risk of developing cervical cancer and may not need another pap or HPV test for three years.

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

A. HPV testing is not recommended for women under 30 because HPV is very common in this age group and usually goes away without causing any health problems. However, if you are under 30 and your Pap test results are abnormal or unclear, your clinician may want to do an HPV test.

Q. *What cervical cancer/HPV vaccines are there?*

A. There are two cervical cancer/HPV vaccines approved by the FDA. Gardasil works by protecting against the four types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer and genital warts. Cervarix works by protecting against the two types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer.

Q. *Are the vaccines safe?*

A. The vaccines have been licensed as safe by the FDA. Before they were approved, the vaccines were tested in thousands of girls and women around the world. The most common side effect is soreness at the injection site, the upper arm. Flu-like symptoms and low grade fever are also common. Sometimes dizziness or fainting can occur after the injection, especially in adolescents. For this reason it is recommended that you are seated or lying down when you receive the shot and remain in the doctor's office or clinic for 15 minutes afterward.

Q. Who should get the HPV vaccine and how is it given?

A. The FDA has approved the vaccine, Gardasil for girls, boys, men and women ages 9 to 26 and the vaccine Cervarix for girls and women ages 10 to 25. It is best to get the shot before the start of sexual activity, however, young women can have the vaccine even if they have already had sex and been infected with HPV. This is because the vaccine can protect women with one type of HPV from being infected with other types of HPV. The vaccine is given as a series of three injections over a six month period.

Q. Do any medical organizations recommend the HPV vaccine?

A. Yes, a number of national organizations have recommended HPV vaccination. They include the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Q. Do women who have been vaccinated still need a Pap test?

A. Yes. The vaccine does not provide protection against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer or against existing HPV infections. Routine Pap tests remain very important to detect precancerous changes in the cervix and to allow treatment before cervical cancer develops.

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

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

www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/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.familypact.org

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).

Medicare..... 800-633-4227

TTY/TTD 877-486-2048

www.medicare.gov

Medicare covers regular screening Pap tests and pelvic examinations every two years. Medicare pays for annual Pap tests for 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.

Office of Women's Health 800-793-8090

www.lapublichealth.org/owh

Low income, uninsured women may call for a referral to a nearby, free or low cost clinic in Los Angeles County for a Pap test and/or mammogram. Operators are available Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm and speak English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese and Armenian.

Planned Parenthood Los Angeles **888-633-0433**
www.plannedparenthood.org/los-angeles
Provides convenient and affordable access to a comprehensive range of quality reproductive health care services. All services are safe and convenient with sixteen health center locations throughout LA County.

LOW & NO-COST CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING AND DIAGNOSTIC REFERRALS

American Cancer Society..... **800-227-2345**
www.cancer.org

**Cancer Information Services
of the National Cancer Institute**..... **800-422-6237**
TTY **800-332-8615**
www.cancer.gov

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 PACT program and/or CDP:EWC. 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.

LOW AND NO-COST HPV VACCINE RESOURCES

2.1.1. Los Angeles County211 o 800-339-6993

TTY 800-660-4026

www.infoline-la.org

Provides information and referrals to community clinics that offer low and no-cost HPV vaccines.

GlaxoSmithKline 877-822-2911

www.gsk-vap.com

The GSK Vaccines Access Program provides GlaxoSmithKline vaccines, including Cervarix, to adult applicants who meet eligibility requirements.

Merck Vaccine Patient Assistance Program 800-293-3881

www.merck.com/merckhelps/vaccines/home.html

Merck has a vaccine patient assistance program for its line of vaccines for use in adults, including Gardasil. Merck provides free vaccines to adults who are 19 and older who are uninsured or unable to afford vaccines.

Vaccines for Children Program 510-620-2630

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc

Provides free vaccines, including the HPV vaccine, to children 18 years and younger. Children are eligible if they are: Medi-Cal or Child Health and Disability Program (CHDP) eligible; uninsured; American Indian or Alaska Native; or whose health insurance does not cover the vaccination. A list of participating providers can be found online at www.eziz.org/pages/vfc_locations2.html