

Pap Smear Guidelines

Cervical cancer is a preventable gynecologic cancer. Pap smear testing (Pap test) is a screening test that looks for pre cancer and/or cancer of the cervix. For the last sixty years it was recommended that women receive pap smears annually, beginning within three years of their first sexual activity. New national guidelines have changed these recommendations dramatically. This is due to the event of:

1. Liquid based pap tests
2. HPV test - HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) can cause pre-cancerous cell changes.

As of 2012, both the United States preventive services task force (USPSTF) and American Cancer Society (ACS) introduced new guidelines focused on:

1. The age to begin screening
 2. Frequency of screening
 3. The age to stop screening
 4. Testing for HPV
- They now recommend testing every three years for most women between 21-65 years of age. Regardless of sexual history. Routine testing for women outside this age range is no longer recommended. Additionally, the option of 5 year screening intervals for women 30-65 years of age when screened with combination of Pap Test with HPV test is also acceptable.
 - HPV screening under the age of 30 is not recommended. Since most women under the age of 30 exposed to the virus will eventually eliminate the virus without any intervention.
 - These recommendations focused on the effectiveness of testing to reduce cancer deaths vs. potential harms that can result from screening. Frequent Pap smear screening can result in false positive results. This could sometimes lean into painful biopsies and possible future pregnancy complications. Research found that less frequent testing produces the same efficacy in reducing cancer deaths, but reduces the potential harm of false positive results. The task force recommendations apply only the healthy women.

Certain risk factors may encourage a doctor to recommend Pap smears outside of these guidelines. More frequent testing may be requested due to a diagnosis of cervical cancer, cervical pre- cancer or dysplasia, exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth, HIV infection, weaken immune system due to organ transplant, Chemo therapy or chronic steroid use. Your physician may discuss frequency of screening and/or stopping screening depending on your personal history.

The doctor may recommend ending Pap smear testing after a total hysterectomy if the hysterectomy was done for benign conditions and if the previous Pap smears were within normal limits. The only cancer that a Pap smear screens for is Cervical Cancer. It does not screen for ovarian, uterine, vaginal and/or vulvar cancers. Any signs or symptoms that are unusual should be brought to your physician's attention.

