

NSW Cervical Screening Program

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. In 2008, the NSW incidence rate was 6.7 new cases of cervical cancer per 100,000 and the mortality rate was 2.5 deaths per 100,000. Approximately 1 in 160 women would be expected to develop cervical cancer by the age of 85.¹ Most women diagnosed with cervical cancer haven't had regular Pap tests.

The NSW Cervical Screening Program was established in 1994. Between 1999 and 2008, the age standardised incidence rates of cervical cancer fell by 20.5% and the age standardised mortality rates remained relatively stable. This decline in cervical cancer incidence is largely attributed to early detection by population screening programs and the subsequent treatment of precancerous abnormalities.

The major risk factor for cervical cancer is persistent infection with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and an increasing risk with age. Other risk factors include a family history of cervical cancer, tobacco smoking and obesity.

Pap tests pick up early warning signs that can be treated before cancer develops. Regular Pap tests every two years can be effective in preventing up to 90% of the most common types of cervical cancer.

The NSW Cervical Screening Program recommends Pap tests every two years for all women aged between 18-69 years, who have ever had sexual intercourse. It's a little bit of awkward for a lot of piece of mind.

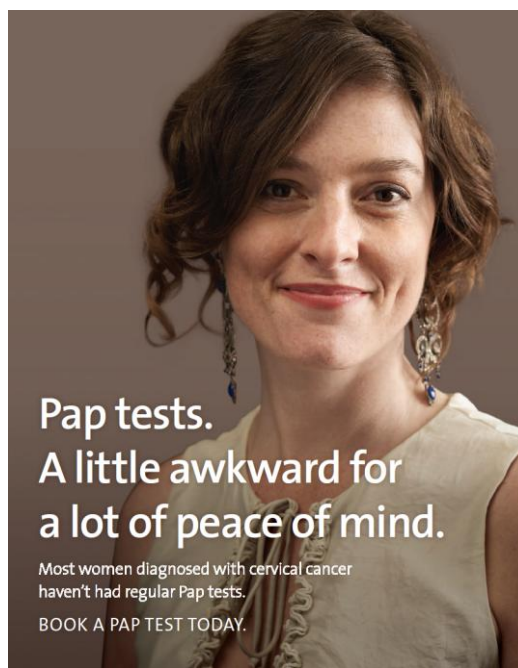
The NSW Cervical Screening Program is a jointly funded Commonwealth/State and Territory initiative managed by the Cancer Institute NSW. For more information on the NSW Cervical Screening Program, visit: www.csp.nsw.gov.au

¹ Tracey, E. Kerr, T. Dobrovic, A. Currow, D. Cancer in NSW: Incidence and Mortality Report 2008. Sydney, Cancer Institute NSW, August 2010.

NSW Cervical Screening Program Campaign – ‘Peace of Mind’

‘Peace of Mind’ aims to increase awareness of the need for women to have regular cervical screening (Pap tests). The campaign encourages women aged 18-69 years to make an appointment for a Pap test every two years. The campaign objective is to increase screening participation with a particular focus on those women not screening at all during the recommended two-yearly interval.

The campaign acknowledges how awkward it can be for a woman to have a Pap test and compares having a Pap test to other awkward things women do. It also reinforces the need for women who have received the HPV vaccine to continue with regular Pap tests to protect against cervical cancer. The TV commercial ends with the tag line “It’s a little awkward, for a lot of peace of mind”.



Pap tests.
A little awkward for
a lot of peace of mind.

Most women diagnosed with cervical cancer
haven't had regular Pap tests.

BOOK A PAP TEST TODAY.

www.csp.nsw.gov.au



Prior to 2007, the NSW Cervical Screening Program had not run a mass media campaign for cervical screening since 1998. Prior to the 2007 ‘Don’t just sit there’ campaign, the NSW Pap Test Register indicated a steady decline in the number of women aged 18-69 years attending regular screening in NSW. The five phases of this campaign ran between May 2007 and June 2010. Analysis of 2008 and 2009 NSW PTR data indicated an increase in the number of women who had a Pap test in each of these years compared to the same period in 2006 (3.5% and 1.9% respectively).

The ‘Peace of Mind’ campaign was originally developed by the Cancer Council Victoria based on research that indicated embarrassment as a significant barrier to women participating in regular cervical screening.

Further information about Pap tests is available by visiting www.csp.nsw.gov.au or by contacting your local Pap test provider. A comprehensive list of Pap test providers in NSW by location can be found at: http://www.csp.nsw.gov.au/Paptest_Providers.aspx

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is a Pap test?

A Pap test is a quick and simple test in which a number of cells are collected from the cervix and sent to a laboratory where they are tested for changes. No drugs or anaesthetics are required and a doctor, women's health nurse or practice nurse can easily do it. Having a Pap test can feel awkward or uncomfortable, but it should not hurt. It only takes a few minutes and is the best protection against cervical cancer.

2. How does a Pap test protect women against cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable of all cancers. A Pap test can detect changes in cervical cells, such as abnormal cells, that have the potential to develop into cervical cancer. These abnormalities can almost always be treated, if found early.

Noncancerous conditions, such as infection and inflammation may also be found.

3. Does an abnormal result always mean a woman has cervical cancer?

No! Over 90% of Pap tests are normal. Only a small number of Pap tests performed show changes in the cells of the cervix. Most of these changes are due to HPV infections which usually clear up naturally without any need for treatment. In a small number of women, these changes may develop into a high grade abnormality and in an even smaller number, may progress to cervical cancer. When detected early by a Pap test, these changes can be treated and cured.

That is why having a Pap test every two years is so important.

4. How effective are Pap tests?

A Pap test every two years can prevent the most common form of cervical cancer in up to 90% of cases and is the best protection against cervical cancer.

5. What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

In the early stages of cervical cancer, there are usually no symptoms at all. The only way you will know is if you have a Pap test.

6. What causes cervical cancer?

Long term infection with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is known to be the cause of almost all cervical cancers. A Pap test every two years can detect any abnormal cell changes caused by HPV, which can then be monitored and/or treated to prevent cancer.

7. Who is at risk of cervical cancer?

All women with a cervix who have ever had sex are at risk of cervical cancer.

About half of the new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed each year are in women over 50 years of age. More women over 50 years of age die from cervical cancer because their cancer is diagnosed at a later stage when treatment is more difficult. Having a Pap test every two years will help prevent most of these cancers in older women in the future.

8. Who should have Pap tests?

All women over 18 who have ever had sex should have regular Pap tests, even if the women are no longer having sex. This includes male to female, and female to female sex.

There is no need to have Pap tests earlier than the age of 18 years, even if the woman has started having sex earlier. At age 70 the doctor may advise that it's safe to stop having Pap tests if the woman has had two normal Pap tests within the last five years.

9. How often should women have a Pap test?

Women should have a Pap test every two years. It may be necessary to have a Pap test more frequently if there have been abnormal cells which are being monitored and/or treated.

10. Do women over 70 years of age need to have a Pap test?

Women 70 years or over, who have never had a Pap test do need to have one. However, women 70 years or over who have had two normal Pap tests within the last five years, do not need to continue having Pap tests, but may do so if they wish.

11. Do women who have been through menopause need to have a Pap test?

Yes. The risk of getting cervical cancer increases with age. If a woman has ever had sex, even with only one partner, it is important to keep having Pap tests. A Pap test every two years until women are 70 years old, even after menopause, is their best protection against cervical cancer.

12. Where can women go to have a Pap test?

A women should choose a person and place that is most convenient to her and where she feels comfortable such as:

- doctor or general practitioner
- community or women's health centre
- family planning clinics or FPA health clinic
- women's health nurse
- sexual health clinic
- Aboriginal Medical Service

Most women tend to visit their general practitioner (GP) for their Pap test as part of a routine health check.

A comprehensive list of Pap test providers by location can be found at:

http://www.csp.nsw.gov.au/Paptest_Providers.aspx

13. What does a Pap test cost?

Two costs are involved – the doctor's consultation fee (collection of the specimen) and the fee for the pathology laboratory (analysis of the specimen).

Costs vary according to providers. Some doctors, clinics, health centres and laboratories 'bulk bill' and if so, there are no out of pocket expenses. Where a fee is charged, women are able to claim a rebate from Medicare. The cost to the woman will be the difference between the rebate and the medical fees.

14. Is there any system to remind women their Pap test is due?

Some doctors and health clinics have reminder systems in place.

The NSW Pap Test Register is a confidential record of all Pap tests of women in NSW and plays a key role in assisting women to keep up to date with their Pap tests. It does this by:

- Sending women a reminder letter when they are 3 months overdue for their next test.

- Working with the woman's doctor or nurse to make sure they have follow-up care if needed.
- Keeping a confidential record of women's Pap test results.

Women can choose to opt off the register in which case a reminder letter will not be sent to her. More information on the NSW Pap Test Register can be found at:

www.cancerinstitute.org.au/cancer_inst/programs/ptr.html

15. What is the HPV vaccine?

There is a new vaccine that can protect women against the cause of most cervical cancers. The vaccine protects women against certain strains of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which are known to cause 7 out of 10 cases of cervical cancer and 9 out of 10 cases of genital warts.

The HPV vaccine is most effective when it is given to girls before they are exposed to HPV. As HPV is sexually transmitted, it is recommended girls be vaccinated before becoming sexually active. The Australian Government provides the HPV vaccine for all females through school programs at age 12-13 years. Women aged over 13 years will need to pay to receive this vaccine from their local GP or medical centre.

More details about the program are available from the Immunise Australia National Hotline on 1800 671 811 or the program website:

www.health.gov.au/internet/standby/publishing.nsf/Content/home

16. Do women who have had the HPV vaccine still need to have Pap tests?

Yes. Pap tests continue to be essential to detect cervical cancers and precancerous changes, even in women who have been vaccinated against strains of HPV. The vaccine protects women against cancer and cervical warts caused by four strains of HPV which are known to cause about 70% of cervical cancers. It does not however, provide protection against all types of cancer caused by HPV.

Links

National Cervical Screening Program

<http://www.cancerscreening.gov.au/internet/screening/publishing.nsf/Content/cervical-about>

NSW Cervical Screening Program

<http://www.csp.nsw.gov.au/>

NSW Pap Test Register

<http://www.cancerinstitute.org.au/data-and-statistics/cancer-registries/nsw-pap-test-register>

National HPV Vaccination Program

<http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/immunise-hpv>

Search for a NSW Pap Test Provider

http://www.csp.nsw.gov.au/Paptest_Providers.aspx