

What if I forget my next Pap smear?

The WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program maintains a register which holds confidential records of all Pap smears and other cervical tests. It acts as a safety net by sending reminder letters to women and doctors when Pap smears and follow-up tests are overdue.

If you don't want your details recorded on the register tell your doctor or nurse.

Where can I have a Pap smear?

Some women feel embarrassed about having a Pap smear. It may help to choose a person and a place where you feel comfortable. You can make an appointment with your doctor, your local Aboriginal Health or Medical Service, Community Health Nurse or Women's Health Centre. You can ask for a woman doctor or nurse to take your Pap smear.

Options available:

- Your doctor
- Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, East Perth
Ph: (08) 9421 3888
- Regional Aboriginal Health or Medical Services
- FPWA (Formerly Family Planning of WA)
Northbridge
Ph: (08) 9227 6177
- WOW Clinic for Women with Disabilities
Shenton Park Outpatient Clinic
Ph: (08) 9382 7141
- Community Health Centres
- Women's Health Centres

Where can I get more information?

For more information ask your local Aboriginal Health Worker, Community Health Nurse or doctor or call the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program on 13 15 56 (cost of a local call).

Acknowledgement

Artist: Emmanuelle Torres

"The women reach out their hands to help others. They hold hands to stick together. The footprints show that they go out to help those in need."

Key Facts

- Aboriginal women have higher rates of cervical cancer
- More Aboriginal women die from cervical cancer than other Australian women because many don't have regular Pap smears
- Cervical cancer can take up to 10 years to develop
- Regular Pap smears can detect cell changes early
- Cell changes can be checked regularly and if they don't clear up by themselves, they can be treated before they turn into cancer
- Early detection is the best protection against cervical cancer

Why Aboriginal women should have regular Pap smears



National Cervical Screening Program
A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Initiative



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2nd Floor Eastpoint Plaza,
233 Adelaide Terrace, Perth WA 6000
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Who needs a Pap smear?

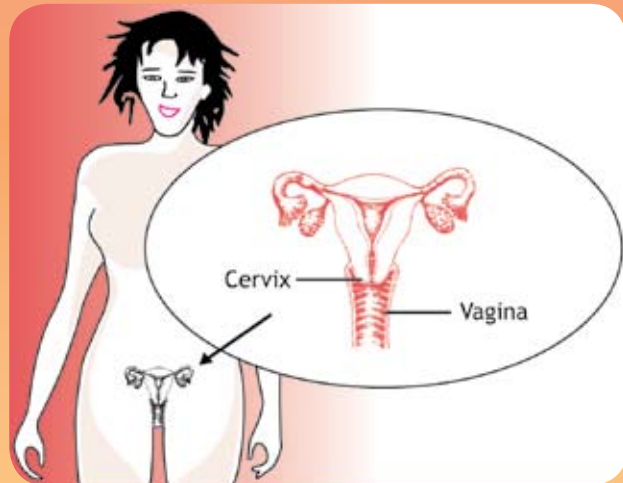
All women over the age of 18 years who have ever been sexually active should have Pap smears every two years, until the age of 70.

Sexual activity includes intercourse, as well as female to female sex.

If you no longer have periods or haven't been sexually active for a long time, you still need to have a Pap smear every two years.

What is a Pap smear?

A Pap smear is a simple test to screen women for changes in the cells of the cervix. Sometimes the cells of the cervix start to change and become abnormal. If necessary, these abnormal cells can be treated long before they turn into cancer. A Pap smear is the best way to detect and prevent cancer of the cervix. Most cancer of the cervix could be prevented if women had regular Pap smears.



How is a Pap smear done?

The doctor or nurse will ask you to undress from the waist down. You will be asked to lie down and an instrument called a speculum will be placed in your vagina so the cervix can be seen clearly. Some cells will be wiped from your cervix with a small brush or spatula. The cells are placed on a glass slide and sent to a laboratory to be tested.

What if my result is abnormal?

It is important to remember that almost all abnormal Pap smear results are not due to cancer. One in every ten Pap smears show cell changes. The majority of abnormal cells found are minor changes that can easily be treated or may clear up naturally.

The Human Papilloma Virus and the link to cervical cancer

Almost all abnormal Pap smear results are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are many different types of HPV and only a few are linked to cervical cancer. Anyone who has ever had sex can have HPV. It is so common that four out of five people will have had it at sometime in their lives. In most cases the virus is cleared naturally by the body in 1 to 2 years.

In rare cases, if left undetected and the virus persists, it can lead to cervical cancer. This usually takes 10 years or more to develop.

The HPV Vaccine

A vaccine has been approved for use in Australia to prevent infection by the main types of Human Papilloma Virus that cause cervical cancer. To be effective the vaccine is best given to young people before they are sexually active.

The vaccine will not protect against all types of HPV which cause cervical cancer, so women who have been vaccinated will still need to have regular Pap smears.

The vaccine is available to girls through the school immunisation program.

What are the signs and symptoms of cervical cancer?

In the early stages of cervical cancer there are usually no symptoms at all. This is why it's so important to have a regular Pap smear. However, if you have any problems like unusual bleeding, discharge or pain, don't wait until your next Pap smear. See a doctor as soon as possible.

When is the best time to have a Pap smear?

The best time to have a Pap smear is two weeks after your last period. If you no longer have periods, anytime is suitable.

What if I've had a hysterectomy?

It depends on the type of hysterectomy you have had. You need to check with your doctor or nurse whether you still need to have Pap smears.