

## What if I forget my next Pap smear?

It's easy to forget your next Pap smear. That's where the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program's Cervical Cytology Registry (CCR) can help. The CCR maintains a confidential database comprising the coded results of all Pap smears and cervical biopsies taken within Western Australia, and has been fully operational since late 1994.

The CCR is a free service, acting as a 'safety net' for WA women, providing reminder letters when Pap smears and other cervical follow-up investigations are overdue.

The confidentiality of the information held by the CCR is protected by law. Only you, your doctor or nurse Pap smear taker and the pathology laboratory that examined your Pap smear can access your record. Please be aware the CCR will follow a strict security protocol when answering enquiries.

When you have your next Pap smear, your results will automatically be forwarded to the CCR, as required by law, unless at the time of your smear you advise your Pap smear taker you do not wish for this to occur.

Further information on the CCR is available from the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program.

## Where can I have a Pap smear?

Choose a person or place where you feel most comfortable.

## Where can I get more information?

WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program  
13 15 56 (cost of a local call) or 1800 800 033  
(toll free from the country)

## Options available are:

- Your doctor
- FPWA  
NORTHBRIDGE (08 9227 6177)
- ISHAR Multicultural Centre for Women's Health  
MIRRABOOKA (08 9345 5335)
- Women with Disabilities  
(call Jane Akerman) SHENTON PARK  
(08 9224 2774)
- Aboriginal Medical or Health Services
  - Derbarl Yerrigan  
EAST PERTH (08 9421 3888)
  - Various regional centres
- Community or Women's Health Centres
  - Women's Health Care House  
NORTHBRIDGE (08 9227 8122)
  - Gosnells Women's Health Service  
GOSNELLS (08 9490 2258)
  - Women's Health Works  
JOONDALUP (08 9300 1566)
  - Midland Women's Health Care  
MIDLAND (08 9250 2221)
  - South Coastal Women's Health  
ROCKINGHAM (08 9550 0900)
  - Fremantle Women's Health Centre  
BEACONSFIELD (08 9430 4545)

**National Cervical  
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Helping Deliver a Healthy WA

 Why you should  
have a regular  
Pap smear



## What is a Pap smear?

A Pap smear is a quick and simple test used to screen women for changes in the cells of the cervix (neck of the womb) that may lead to cervical cancer.

A special instrument called a speculum is gently placed in the vagina so the cervix can be seen clearly. A doctor or specially trained nurse rubs a cell sample from the surface of the cervix using a small wooden spatula (like a popstick) or a cytobrush (a fine nylon brush) and 'smears' them onto a glass slide. The slide is sent to a laboratory to be analysed.

## Do I need a Pap smear?

Every woman over 18 years of age who has ever had sexual contact should have regular Pap smears every two years. Sexual contact includes intercourse, as well as female-to-female sex.

After you turn 70, your doctor may advise you that you no longer need to have Pap smears if your previous smears were normal.

Even if you no longer have periods or haven't had sexual contact for a long time, you still need to have a Pap smear every two years.

## Why are Pap smears important?

Up to 90% of the most common type of cervical cancer can be prevented if early cell changes are detected and if necessary, treated. Three out of every four women who develop cervical cancer have either never had a Pap smear or not had one in the last five years. The Pap smear is the best method available to detect these early cell changes and prevent cancer of the cervix.

## What if I've had a hysterectomy?

You do not need to have a Pap smear if you have had a total hysterectomy in which the uterus and cervix have both been removed for a benign (not cancerous) condition such as heavy bleeding, fibroids or a prolapse.

If you did not have your cervix removed or you had a hysterectomy for either cancer or a pre-cancerous condition, you may still need to have a Pap smear. Check with your doctor.

Further information on this topic is available from the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program.

## When is the best time to have a Pap smear?

The best time to have a Pap smear is midway between periods. If you no longer have periods, any time is suitable.

If you have symptoms such as unusual bleeding, discharge or pain, see your doctor as soon as possible - even if your last Pap smear was less than two years ago and was normal.

## Where can I have a Pap smear?

Your doctor can take your Pap smear, and many family practices have women's health nurses who can also take smears.

In addition to family practices, female health care providers are also available through Community and Women's Health Centres. There are contact numbers on the back of this pamphlet to help you locate one close to you.

Whichever you choose, it is important that you feel comfortable and relaxed.

## How much will it cost?

Medicare covers most of the cost of a Pap smear and you can ask how much you will need to pay when you make an appointment. Your doctor may offer you newer technologies, however these are not currently reimbursed by Medicare.

## How long before I get my results?

It usually takes one to two weeks for the laboratory to provide the results to the doctor or nurse who took your Pap smear. Make sure you contact your Pap smear taker to get your results.

## What if my result is not normal?

If your result is abnormal this does NOT mean you have cancer. One in every ten smears shows cell changes. The majority of abnormal cells found are minor changes or simple conditions that can be easily treated or may clear up naturally.

In a small number of cases the changes may be more significant and may need further investigation. These changes, if left untreated, may later develop into cervical cancer.

If your Pap smear result is abnormal, your doctor will discuss with you the need for further observation or treatment, such as colposcopy (a magnified view of the cervix).

You may need to have your following Pap smears more frequently.

Further information on abnormal Pap smears is available from the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program.

## Is cervical cancer a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

Cervical cancer is NOT an STI, however the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV or wart virus), which is transmitted via genital skin contact, can cause cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer if left untreated. HPV is unlikely to cause cancer by itself.

Further information on the link between HPV and cervical cancer is available from the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program.

