

Health PEI

One Island Health System

PEI's Cervical Cancer Screening Guidelines: What Women Should Know

Why do guidelines change?

PEI's Cervical Cancer Screening Guidelines are based on the latest scientific research and the best evidence available. It is important the clinical practice guidelines are reviewed regularly so that women can benefit from good screening practices. PEI's Cervical Cancer Screening Guidelines were updated in 2013.

Over the past 30 years, the number of woman diagnosed with cervical cancer has decreased more than 40% in PEI. This is due to good screening practices. We want to ensure that all Island women receive the right test at the right time so that cervical cancer can be prevented.

Cervical cancer screening is currently done using the Pap test. Having regular Pap tests is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer.

When should women start getting a Pap test?

It is recommended that you should start having Pap tests **at 21 years of age** if you have ever been sexually active.*

If you have not been sexually active by the time you turn 21 years of age, you can delay screening until you do.

**Sexual activity includes intercourse as well oral or touching with a partner's genital area (male or female).*

More evidence is now available demonstrating that abnormal cervical cells in young women are more often able to go away on their own without treatment or follow-up procedures. And that some procedures when performed at a young age could cause potential harm .

If you are of higher risk or not sure if you should wait to age 21, consult with your health care provider.

How often should you have a Pap test?

It is recommended that all women who have ever been sexually active and are at average risk should have regular Pap tests **every 2 years** starting age 21.

There is no need for more frequent Pap testing unless you require follow-up to an abnormal test. This would be directed by your health care provider.

How do I get screened for Cervical Cancer in PEI?

Pap testing is done by a family physician, a nurse practitioner or a registered nurse.

You can:

- Contact your family doctor or nurse practitioner's office for an appointment
- Call Health PEI's cervical cancer screening service at 1-888-561-2233 to access a pap screening clinic near you. Clinics are offered by nurses and nurse practitioners.

What if you have had a hysterectomy?

It is important to understand whether your cervix remains or if it was removed during your hysterectomy. If your cervix remains, (sub-total hysterectomy) follow screening guidelines as recommended for all women.

If you no longer have a cervix (total hysterectomy), it is not necessary to be screened. Please consult with your health care provider to determine what screening is right for you based on your history.

When do you stop doing regular Pap tests?

It is recommended that **all women 65 years of age, who have had an adequate history of normal Pap test in the past 10 years**, can discontinue screening. (i.e. three or more)

If you are over 65 years of age and have not had 3 normal Pap tests in the previous 10 years, please continue screening until you do or consult with your health care provider on what is needed.

What if I had the HPV Vaccine?

It is recommended that all women who are sexually active, whether they have had the HPV vaccine or not, be screened regularly.

Should I have an HPV Test?

Testing for HPV is a similar procedure to the Pap test. Women over the age of 30 may consider this type of test; however it would be done at the cost of the woman. If you are 30 years of age or older we recommend that you consult with your health care provider regarding this test. Until there is further scientific evidence for the benefits of HPV testing and management of a positive HPV results, Health PEI is not recommending screening using HPV tests at this time.

For more information:

- ✓ Ask a health care provider. Physicians, nurse practitioners and registered nurses at your local health centre can help you decide what screening is right for you.
- ✓ Call 811 Tele-health services (multi-lingual)
- ✓ Call Health PEI's cervical cancer screening service at 1-888-561-2233