

Screening for Cervical Cancer

Until recently, screening for cervical cancer was done by having Pap smears, a scraping from the cervix smeared onto a slide and read by a cytologist. Cells were often clumped or surrounded by mucus making the smears difficult to read. There was about a 12% error rate, but since it takes many years for a cancer to develop, this was a safe system. When the Pap was abnormal, women had an office procedure called colposcopy.

In the last few years, cells from the cervical scraping were suspended in a solution. This allowed cells to be distributed more evenly on the slide, screened by computer and re-read by a cytologist.

Also in the last few years, HPV (human papilloma virus) was found to be the cause of cervical cancer. The cells in the same Pap solution can be tested for this virus. Any abnormal Pap is checked for the presence of the virus. Then, if the HPV test is negative, those women with a slightly abnormal Pap are not at risk for cervical cancer and do not need further testing.

Recently, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommended that women over the age of 31 be screened with a liquid-based Pap and HPV test done at the same time. If women have a normal Pap **and** a negative HPV, they can safely wait for three years to have another screening. This is also our recommendation to most of our patients. While no screening method is 100% accurate, the new testing protocol has a lower rate of errors than yearly Pap tests.

If you are under 31, or have other risk factors, this is not the appropriate way to be screened for cervical cancer. Your physician will give you different recommendations.

While we are recommending you have a Pap and HPV every three years, **we are continuing to recommend an annual visit to our office.** This gives us the opportunity to check you for other gynecologic problems, refill medications and to discuss related health issues and preventive measures. For women who do not see another physician on a regular basis, we can also order routine lab tests.

In addition to cervical cancer screening, cells from the Pap smear can be used to screen for chlamydia and gonorrhea. For women under age 25, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends running these tests yearly.

Patient's Signature

Patient's Printed Name

Today's Date