

## Will I get a Pap at my Annual Exam?

How often you should have cervical cancer screening and which tests you should have depend on your age and health history. Studies over the past decades have found that there is no advantage to having yearly Pap tests over Pap tests every 3 years. New guidelines for the prevention and early detection of cervical cancer generally advise a reduction in the number of tests women get over their lifetime to better ensure that they receive the benefits of testing while minimizing unnecessary follow up tests, and include a preference for co-testing using the Pap test and HPV test for women ages 30-65.

The new guidelines are a change from the yearly screening that many women have had in the past. **A yearly “Well Woman” exam that includes a pelvic and breast exam as well as an assessment of your overall health is still recommended.**

The Pap test looks at a small sample of cells from the cervix. The HPV test looks for the presence of high risk HPV cells in the cervix which can lead to cervical cancer. HPV is a virus transmitted during sexual activity. HPV testing is not recommended for women younger than 30 years of age. This infection is very common in younger women and usually goes away on its own.

If you’ve had a hysterectomy, you may still need to have cervical screening. It depends on why your hysterectomy was needed, whether your cervix was removed and whether you have a history of moderate or severe dysplasia.

Your age and health history (prior abnormal results, changes in sexual partners, etc) can affect how often you should have screenings and which tests you should have. Talk with your health care provider about the screening schedule that is recommended for you.

### **Current guidelines are:**

- Women aged 21-29 years should have a Pap test every 3 years.
- Women aged 30-65 years should have a Pap test and an HPV test (co-testing) every 5 years (preferred). It is acceptable to have a Pap test alone every 3 years.
- Women should stop having cervical cancer screening after age 65 if they do not have a history of moderate or severe dysplasia or cancer and they have had either three negative Pap test results in a row or two negative co-test results in a row within the past 10 years, with the most recent test performed within the past 5 years.