

Testing for Cervix Cancer

In 2008, about 157 Arkansas women were diagnosed with cervix cancer and about 48 women died from it. The average age at diagnosis is 48 years and it is almost always caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is passed from one person to another during sex.

Two tests are used to check for cervix cancer:

- The Pap test looks for changes in cells in the cervix that could turn into cervix cancer.
- The HPV test looks for the type of HPV virus that can cause cervix cancer.

Benefits and Possible Harms

Pap and HPV tests can prevent cancer of the cervix by finding changes in the cells before they become cancer. If cancer has occurred, Pap tests can find it early, when treatment works best.

Pap tests may also have some harmful effects. The tests may cause bleeding, pain, or infection. Bad results may make women feel anxious or upset. Pap tests may also lead to other tests that are not needed or that may cause harms for some women.

The U.S. Preventive Service Task Force Recommendations on Testing for Cervix Cancer: What do they mean for you?

The Task Force is a group of experts who look at the best available science and research when making suggestions to improve the health of all people. When the Task Force recommends testing, it is because the test has more possible benefits than possible harms. When the Task Force recommends against testing, it is because the test has more possible harms than possible benefits. You may choose from these recommendations:



Pap test every 3 years for women ages 21 to 29 years old

or



Three options for women ages 30-64 years old:

- Pap test every 3 years
- Pap test and HPV test every 5 years
- HPV test every 5 years



No testing for cancer of the cervix in women age 66 or older who are not high-risk for cervix cancer **and** have had 3 normal Pap tests in a row or 2 normal HPV tests in a row within the past 10 years. The most recent Pap/HPV test should be within the past 5 years.



No testing for women who had surgery to remove their uterus (womb) with removal of the cervix and who have not had abnormal cells (CIN 2, CIN 3) or cancer of the cervix in the past.

How Often Will You Choose to Get Tested?

Think about this expert advice and your own health, lifestyle, personal beliefs, and desires. Talk with your nurse or doctor about your risks for cervical cancer and how often Pap/HPV testing should fit into your health care plan. You may choose a Pap test every 3 years or both Pap test and HPV test every 5 years.

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