

Cervical Cancer Screening Talking Points

What is the main cause of cervical cancer?

The main cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus (HPV), the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Most people with HPV do not even know they have it because they never have symptoms or problems. Usually the body's immune system will fight off the infection, and it goes away on its own. But sometimes an HPV infection does not go away, and this can cause abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. If left untreated, these abnormal changes eventually can lead to cervical cancer.

What are the cervical cancer screening guidelines?

Current guidelines recommend that women should have a Pap test every three years beginning at age 21. These guidelines also recommend that women ages 30 to 65 should have a Pap test along with an HPV test every five years or a Pap test alone every three years. Women with certain risk factors may need to have more frequent screening or to continue screening beyond age 65.

What is the difference between a Pap test and an HPV test?

The Pap test is a screening test that can detect the abnormal changes in the cervical cells before they become cancer. If cancer does occur, the Pap test can find it early when it is easier to treat. An HPV test can find any of the types of HPV that can cause the abnormal cell changes on the cervix. The HPV test is done at the same time as the Pap test.

What are the options available for women to get a Pap and/or HPV test?

Women can go to an OB/GYN or Primary health-care provider.

Another option is the North Dakota Family Planning Program, which provides reproductive health services to women, including Pap tests, pelvic exams and breast exams. Family Planning has nine main clinics and 14 satellite clinics located throughout the state. Clients are charged for services according to their household income and family size. To learn more about the Family Planning Program, call 701.328.2228 or visit <http://www.ndhealth.gov/familypanning/> to find a clinic near you.

For women unable to get a Pap test and/or HPV test because they are uninsured or underinsured, *Women's Way* may provide a way to pay. *Women's Way*, North Dakota's Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, is available to eligible North Dakota women ages 40 through 64. *Women's Way* may provide a way to pay for pelvic exams, Pap tests, clinical breast exams and mammograms. To learn more about *Women's Way* or to see if you are eligible, call 1.800.44 WOMEN or visit www.ndhealth.gov/womensway.

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