



C-Gyn 5

Screening for the prevention of cervical cancer

The Cervical Screening Programs of Australia and New Zealand aim to reduce incidence and death from cervical cancer, in a cost effective manner, through an organised approach to cervical screening. Policy in both countries is similar but not identical.

Current national policy in Australia is:

- (a) Routine screening with cervical smears should be carried out every two years for women who have no symptoms or history suggestive of abnormal cytology.
- (b) All women who have ever been sexually active should commence having a cervical smear between the ages of 18 and 20 years, or one or two years after first intercourse, whichever is the later.
- (c) Cervical smears may cease at the age of 70 years for women who have had two normal cervical smears within the last five years. Women over 70 years who have never had a smear or who request a cervical smear should be screened.

Current national policy in New Zealand is:

- (a) All women who have ever had intercourse should be offered a three yearly cervical smear test from age 20 to age 69. If it is a woman's first smear or there is a gap of five or more years since her last one the second smear should be taken in one years time.
- (b) Regular screening should commence at age 20 years, for women who have had sexual intercourse
- (c) At age 70 years women with normal smear results may cease to have cervical smears.

Note: the above national policies apply to women in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

In both Australia and New Zealand guidelines are available for the Management of Women with Screen Detected Abnormalities. The New Zealand guidelines were last updated in 1999. Revised guidelines are due to be implemented in 2008. The Australian guidelines were revised in 2005.

- New Zealand National Cervical Screening Programme Guidelines For The Management Of Women With Abnormal Cervical Smears
<http://www.healthywomen.org.nz/ncspprog/contents.aspx>
- NHMRC Guidelines for the Management of Women with Screen Detected Abnormalities
<http://www.cervicalscreen.health.gov.au/professionals/guidelines.html>
- *Cervical screening in Australia 2005–2006*
http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/can/csa05_06/csa05-06.pdf

Primary prevention of cervical cancer is enhanced with HPV vaccination. Seventy percent of all cervical cancers are caused by HPV 16 and 18. It is anticipated that vaccination will substantially reduce incidence and mortality rates. The Australian Government funded

National HPV vaccination program commenced in Australia in April 2007. Vaccination of girls aged 12 -13 is recommended. Until July 2009 Government funded vaccination is available to women under the age of 27. In New Zealand a Government funded HPV vaccination program is in the process of being implemented. At the present time, uptake of HPV vaccination does not alter the guidelines for screening as outlined above.

The most recent evaluation of the Australian National Cervical Screening Program (2005 – 2006) was published in 2008. The aged standardized participation rate continues to be in the region of 60%, and recruiting unscreened and under-screened women to the programme remains a priority. There is some concern regarding the decline in the participation rates of women less than 40 yrs of age but there has been an increase in participation among women aged 55 years and over.

Links to other related College Statements

[C-Gyn 6 Guidelines for referral of investigation of intermenstrual and postcoital bleeding](#)

[C-Gyn 8 Pap smears after hysterectomy](#)

[C-Gyn 9 Management of the menopause](#)

[C-Gyn 13 RANZCOG/RACGP Joint statement on Pap smears](#)

Patient Resources

NSW - <http://www.csp.nsw.gov.au/>

VIC - <http://www.papscreen.org/index.htm>

SA - <http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/branches/branch-cervix.htm>

QLD - <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/PapSmearRegistry/>

NZ – <http://www.healthed.govt.nz/details/content.cfm?id=418>

Publications

Cervical Screening in Australia 1999-2000; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/can/csa99-00/index.html>

Screening to prevent cervical cancer: guidelines for the management of asymptomatic women with screen-detected abnormalities; NHMRC National Cervical Screening Program, 9 June 2005 http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/_files/wh39.pdf

Disclaimer

This College Statement is intended to provide general advice to Practitioners. The statement should never be relied on as a substitute for proper assessment with respect to the particular circumstances of each case and the needs of each patient.

The statement has been prepared having regard to general circumstances. It is the responsibility of each Practitioner to have regard to the particular circumstances of each case, and the application of this statement in each case. In particular, clinical management must always be responsive to the needs of the individual patient and the particular circumstances of each case.

This College statement has been prepared having regard to the information available at the time of its preparation, and each Practitioner must have regard to relevant information, research or material which may have been published or become available subsequently.

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