

# Keep having Pap tests



‘Every  
woman.  
Every two  
years.’



There's been lots of discussion in the news lately about proposed changes to women's cervical cancer screening.

These changes will not be implemented before mid-2017. Until then, it's important to continue to have two-yearly Pap tests, regardless of whether you have had the HPV vaccine.

Australian women have access to one of the most successful cervical screening programs in the world. One of the reasons that it has been so successful is that women have done their part by having their regular two-yearly Pap tests. We don't want Australian women to lose the benefits of this program by not understanding that they need to keep being screened every two years until the new changes are fully implemented.



## What does a Pap test actually check for?

Put simply, a Pap test checks for changes to the cells of the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer if left untreated.

## Who should have a Pap test?

Every woman who has ever had sex should have regular Pap tests, because it gives you the best chance of detecting pre-cancerous cells while they can be easily treated.

## If I've had the HPV vaccine, do I still need to be tested?

Absolutely. There's a misconception among some young women that the HPV vaccine means that they no longer need regular Pap tests, but this simply isn't true. Vaccinated women should have two-yearly Pap tests like everyone else.

Recent research revealed an alarming trend among Australian women aged between 25 and 29, who are not presenting for Pap tests in the same numbers as they used to.

So if you are vaccinated - or you know a young woman who is vaccinated - make sure that two-yearly testing is continued until the new changes are announced.



## **What is the new program?**

Instead of having two-yearly Pap tests, the new program will use HPV testing. It is a different methodology that only requires testing every five years.

## **When will the new program come into effect?**

It is expected that the new program will come into effect some time in 2017. A strong advertising and communications campaign will surround the changes, so that all women are properly informed.

## **So, can't I just wait another five years to have my next test?**

The five-year time interval will only apply to the new HPV test. Pap tests need to be performed at more regular intervals in order to be effective. Until 2017, that means you need to keep screening every two years (or more frequently if any abnormalities have been detected).

## **Can't I just get the HPV test done now?**

Unfortunately, no. Changes still need to be made to the Cervical Screening Program and Pap Test Registers before they can incorporate the use of HPV as a screening test. At the moment, the Pap smear is the only screening method that attracts a Medicare rebate.

### **What should I do now?**

The message is clear. Don't take your health for granted.

Keep having a Pap test every two years until your doctor or your local Pap registry informs you that the new changes to the Cervical Screening Program have come into effect.

Of course, if you have any symptoms, such as bleeding, pain or discharge, make sure you consult your doctor.



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