

Current Pap Smear Screening guideline *By Trinh Doan, MD*

Cervical cancer was a major cause of death amongst women of childbearing age, as recently as the 1940s. The Pap smear test was invented and named after the Greek physician Dr. Georgios Papanikolaou in 1928 however the significance of this test was not realized until much later in the 1940s. Today, the Pap smear test is used worldwide to detect cervical cancer and other abnormal cells in the vagina. It is now recognized as one of the most successful cancer screening tests available in the market and is responsible for saving the lives of many women.

Most cases of cervical cancer are caused by certain strains of the Human Papilloma Virus, also referred to as HPV. HPV is very common and most infections caused by this virus will be fought off by the immune system naturally without causing cancer. However there are some strains of HPV that are high-risk for developing into cervical cancer, specifically HPV types 16 and 18. The good news is that HPV infection is preventable with the use of condoms and by receiving the Gardasil vaccines. Both males and females, up to the age of 26, should receive the

Gardasil vaccine to protect against HPV.

With the introduction of new technology, it is now possible to detect the presence of HPV with the Pap smear sample; therefore, the guidelines for performing a Pap smear screening have changed in recent years.

Risks for developing cervical cancer include but are not limited to:

1. HPV infection with high risk strains mainly type 16 and 18. These strains can be tested with the Pap smear sample.
2. Cigarette smoking.
3. History of multiple sexual partners.
4. Immunosuppression due to medications and/or illnesses.
5. Lack of regular follow up with a PCP or GYN.

It is recommend that the first Pap smear be performed at age 21 or once sexually active, whichever occurs first. If that test is normal, testing is recommended every three years thereafter. If abnormal cervical cells are detected, then HPV

testing will automatically be done using the same Pap smear sample. When a Pap smear and HPV testing are done with the same sample, this is called co-testing. The physician will determine the best course of treatment based on the type of abnormal cervical cells identified and type of HPV infection found.

After age 30, a Pap smear is performed either alone or with HPV co-testing. If HPV infection is not detected and the Pap smear is normal, the frequency of testing can be lessened to every five years. However if a Pap smear is being done without HPV, then the Pap smear should be done every three years. Pap smear testing can be stopped after the age of 65 if the patient has had regular routine screenings throughout her lifetime and no history of abnormal Pap smear. Patients with high risk for developing cervical cancer should continue with Pap smears up to the age of 80.

It is important to note that even though a Pap smear is indicated every 3 to 5 years for most women, all patients should continue seeing their PCP at least once a year.

Thanksgiving Holiday Hours

Did you know that recent studies have proven that grateful people experience fewer aches and pains? Well, research or not, we are grateful for YOU and your trust in our care.

Should you need us on Thanksgiving weekend, please know that our offices will be closed on Thursday, November 26th but we will see patients on an urgent care basis on Friday the 27th at our Glendale suite #F-1 location. Wishing you a safe and happy Thanksgiving!



Thunderbird Internal Medicine – Glendale
5620 W. Thunderbird Rd #C-1, #F-1 & #G-2
Glendale, Arizona 85306

Thunderbird Internal Medicine - Phoenix
9150 W. Indian School Rd #118
Phoenix, Arizona 85037