

Clinical Practice Alert

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Most women age 21-69 who have ever been sexually active should have a Pap test every 3 years. CervixCheck, CancerCare Manitoba does not recommend routine cervical cancer screening for individuals under the age of 21. Transgender men and women may also need regular Pap tests.

Cervical cancer screening should only be performed for patients who meet Manitoba's [CervixCheck Screening Guidelines](#). Screening should be initiated at 21 years of age for all women who have ever been sexually active. Routine screening for individuals under the age of 21 has **not** been recommended since 2013. Updated CervixCheck Screening Guidelines will be posted in early 2018. Visit [GetCheckedManitoba.ca](#) for more information.

Starting screening at age 21 is based on a harms-benefit comparison. The harms of screening women under 21 years of age outweigh the potential benefits. Potential harms include:

- Pap tests and follow-up procedures expose young women to anxiety and harms including reduced reproductive performance (preterm delivery, low birth weight, increased caesarean section rate, and premature rupturing of membranes).
- Cervical cancer in young women is very rare. The incidence rate for invasive cervical cancer in Canadian women 15-19 and 20-24 years old was 0.2 per 100,000 and 1.2 per 100,000, respectively (2005-2007). Since 2009 there have been zero cases of invasive cervical cancer in Manitoban women under the age of 20. Three cases have been diagnosed in women 20-24. Evidence suggests that these cancers would not have been detected by screening.
- Most cytological abnormalities in young women are low-grade and non-oncogenic. About 90% will spontaneously regress within 24 months.
- A long latency period supports delaying screening initiation in young women as lesions can be detected and treated after the age of 21.
- False-positive and false-negative Pap test results may occur. This is true for a Pap test completed at any age. The sensitivity of a Pap test is 51% and the specificity is 98%.

Health care providers should discuss the benefits and harms of screening with all patients. If your patient is under 21 years of age and has pre-existing Pap test results, follow-up management may be required. Please refer to CervixCheck's [Managing the Screening History of Women Under 21 Years of Age](#) for further information.

CervixCheck, CancerCare Manitoba operates an organized, population-based screening program in Manitoba. Cervical cancer screening recommendations set by CervixCheck are based on evidence of reduced incidence and mortality, and a comparison of the benefits and harms of screening at the population level. They are consistent with recommendations made in most Canadian provinces/territories, align with recommendations made by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, and are endorsed by the Society of Obstetrics and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC).

Patient Impact:

- Reduce unnecessary follow-up and treatments
- Reduce unnecessary discomfort or bleeding from a Pap test or colposcopy
- Reduce patient anxiety that may result from abnormal test results
- Reduce over-diagnosis of abnormal cell changes that would go away on their own
- Reduce potential problems with future pregnancies from certain colposcopy treatments

System Improvements: Reduce unnecessary testing, improving services for women.

Distribution: This Clinical Practice Alert is directed to all ordering clinicians within Manitoba.

Contact Information: Questions? Please contact the DSM phone center at 204-787-1534 or CervixCheck at 1-855-95-CHECK.

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More information:

CervixCheck, CCMB: [Who should get checked?](#)

CervixCheck, CCMB: [Understanding the New Screening Guidelines for Cervical Cancer](#)

Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada: [What is a Pap test?](#)

Canadian Cancer Society: [Screening for Cervical Cancer](#)

Choosing Wisely Canada: [Pap Tests: When you need them and when you don't](#)

References:

- Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care, et al. Recommendations on screening for cervical cancer. CMAJ. 2013 Jan 8;185(1):35-45. [PMID: 23297138](#).
- Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. [Cancer screening programs across Canada](#). March 16, 2017.
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada, et al. [Position Statement: Recommendations on screening for cervical cancer](#). February 20, 2013.
- Popadiuk et al. Invasive cervical cancer incidence and mortality among Canadian women aged 15 to 29 and the impact of screening. JOGC. December 2012.34(12):1167-1176. [PMID:23231799](#).

Choosing Wisely Manitoba, a partnership of the Centre for Healthcare Innovation and Diagnostic Services Manitoba, is an initiative to improve the appropriate use of diagnostic testing in our province.