

Talking to Your Clients About Pap Screening Intervals

The Family PACT Program has adopted the guidelines for the frequency of cervical cancer screening (Pap smears) issued by the American Cancer Society and the 2006 Consensus Guidelines of the American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (ASCCP) for the management of abnormal cervical cytology.

Some clients may be uncomfortable with the guidelines or wonder why they are no longer receiving a “routine, annual” cervical cancer screening or Pap smear. Below are some questions your clients might ask and ways to respond to them.

When should I get my first Pap test?

- You should have your first Pap test when you are 21 years old.

Many of my friends have human papillomavirus (HPV). If I’m a teen and just started having sexual intercourse, why shouldn’t I be screened?

- Even though the rate of HPV infection is high among sexually active teens, the immune system usually clears the HPV infection within a couple of years.
- Most of the time, any problems we might see go away on their own.
- It’s very rare for women under the age of 21 to get cancer of the cervix.
- The cervix could be harmed by having too many unneeded tests and procedures.

If I’m in the age group of 21 through 29, how often should I get a Pap test?

- If you are at low risk, you should get a Pap test every 2 years.

What might put me at high risk so I’d need to have a Pap test more often?

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- An organ transplant
- A history of abnormal Pap smears
- Chemotherapy
- A compromised immune system
- Chronic steroid use
- Exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth

If I'm over the age of 30, how often should I get a Pap test?

- If you have had 3 normal Pap tests in a row, you only need a Pap test every two to three years.

Why did the Pap screening interval guidelines change?

- Research showed that testing less often prevents cancer of the cervix just as well as testing each year.
- The guidelines changed to make sure there was a better balance between the benefits and risks of getting Pap tests.

If I ask for an annual Pap test, can I still get one?

- Yes, but it is important to think about the risks and benefits.

Where can I read more about how often I should get a Pap test?

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
www.acog.org
- American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
- American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (ASCCP)
www.asccp.org

If Family PACT Providers have questions about the adopted Pap Screening Interval Guidelines or other Family PACT Program policies call:

The Family PACT Provider Resource Line
1-877-FAMPACT (326-7228)

or visit

The Family PACT website
(www.familypact.org)