

# Clinical Practice Alert

Date Issued: February 9, 2018

---

***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.

**Clinical Practice Change issued by:**

- 1. Diagnostic Services Manitoba:** *Jim Slater, DSM Chief Executive Officer; Dr. Amin Kabani, Chief Medical Officer; Dr. Gabor Fischer, Medical Director of Anatomical Pathology; Karen Cormier, DSM Project Manager*
- 2. CervixCheck, CancerCare Manitoba:** *Dr. Piotr Czaykowski, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Robert Lotocki, CervixCheck Medical Director; Dr. Erin Dean, Gynaecological Oncology Disease-Site Group Chair, Carrie O'Conaill, CervixCheck Program Manager; Kelly Bunzeluk, Director of CCMB Screening Programs*

**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.