

Breast Awareness and Pap Smear

Australia has national screening programs for breast and cervical cancers. Regular screening saves lives. Women aged between 18 and 69 should have a Pap smear every two years. Women aged between 50 and 69 should have a mammogram every two years.

Breast cancer

Most changes in a woman's breasts are normal changes related to menstruation (periods), pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause or ageing. Sometimes a breast change will be due to cancer. The risk of getting breast cancer increases with age and most breast cancers occur in women over 50 years of age.

It is important to detect breast cancer as early as possible, in order to have the best chance of successful treatment and recovery.

Breast awareness

Every woman needs to be familiar with her own breasts. If you know what is normal for you at different times of your menstrual cycle and at different stages

of your life, you can check for abnormal changes in your breasts.

How to examine your breasts:

Get to know the normal look and feel of your breasts as part of everyday activities like showering, dressing or putting on body lotion.

- Look at your breasts in the mirror – look at the shape, size and skin of your breasts and nipples. Are there differences between the two breasts or nipples? If so, have they appeared in the last few months?
- Feel your breasts. Remember that your breasts extend to under your collarbone, up under the armpit and include the area around the nipples.

Changes to look for include:

- a new lump or lumpiness, especially if it is only in one breast
- a discharge from the nipple that occurs without squeezing
- a change in the shape or size of your breast
- a change to the nipple such as crusting, ulcer, redness or inversion
- a change in the skin of your breast such as redness or dimpling
- an unusual pain that does not go away.

See a doctor as soon as possible if you have any breast changes that are unusual for you. Most of these changes will not be due to breast cancer, but it is important to have all unusual breast symptoms checked.

You may also wish to have a breast examination done by your doctor once every year. Discuss this with your doctor.

Mammograms

A breast x-ray called a mammogram is the best way to detect early breast changes that may be breast cancer, even where there are no symptoms. A doctor can arrange a mammogram or you can go to the BreastScreen Australia program in your area.

BreastScreen Australia is the national breast cancer screening program. You do not need a referral from a doctor to go to BreastScreen. For more information or to arrange an appointment, phone 13 20 50.

- BreastScreen Australia advises all women aged 50–69 years to attend BreastScreen for a free mammogram every two years.
- Women aged 40–49, and 70 years and older, can also have a free BreastScreen mammogram every two years. If you are in these age groups, your doctor can help you to decide whether to have regular mammograms.

Women of all ages who have a higher risk of breast cancer (e.g. have a strong family history of breast cancer) should ask their doctor about a personal monitoring program. This may include regular breast examinations, mammograms and/or ultrasounds.

Cervical cancer

Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of a woman's uterus that connects to her vagina. Most cervical cancer is caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a very common sexually transmitted virus. All women with a cervix who have ever had sex are at risk of HPV infection and cervical cancer.

Vaccination with HPV vaccine can prevent infection from the two main cancer-causing strains of the HPV virus. However the HPV vaccine does not protect against all cancer-causing strains of HPV, so women who have been vaccinated still need to have regular Pap smears.

A Pap smear every two years is the best protection against cervical cancer.

Pap smear

The Pap smear is a quick and simple test that can find early changes in cervical cells that might develop into cancer.

For a Pap smear, a doctor or nurse collects cells from the surface of the woman's cervix and puts (smears) them on a glass slide. The slide is then sent to a laboratory for testing. The woman does not need to have medicines or an anaesthetic during a Pap smear.

Most women do not find the Pap smear painful, but sometimes it can be uncomfortable.

Who should have Pap smear?

- The National Cervical Screening Program advises all women over 18 years of age who have ever had sex to have a Pap smear every two years, even if no longer have sex.
- Some women who have had a hysterectomy still need to have a Pap smear every two years.
- After menopause women need to keep having a Pap smear every two years. Some women can stop having Pap smears once they reach 70 years of age. Ask a doctor for advice.

Where can you have a Pap smear?

Pap smears can be done by local doctors, at family planning clinics and at health or medical centres. Some providers 'bulk bill', which means there

is no cost to you. You can check the cost when making an appointment.

A National Cervical Screening Program register operates in each State and Territory. The register keeps a confidential record of your Pap smear results. When you have a Pap smear you will automatically go onto this register unless you ask to be excluded. If you are on the register, you will get a reminder when your Pap smear is due. For more information phone the National Cervical Screening Program on 13 15 56.

HPV vaccine

The HPV vaccine is provided free by the National Immunisation Program (NIP) to girls aged 12-13 years in the first year of high school. From 2013, the HPV vaccine will also be given to 12-13 year old boys. The NIP aims to vaccinate girls and boys before they are sexually active, as the vaccine works best when given before they are exposed to HPV. Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice about HPV vaccine.

For more information

BreastScreen Australia

National breast screening program

Phone: 13 20 50 for information and appointments

Website: www.cancerscreening.gov.au

National Cervical Screening Program

Phone: 13 15 56

Website: www.cancerscreening.gov.au

Breast Cancer Network Australia

Phone: 1800 500 258

Website www.bcna.org.au

Cancer Australia

Website:

www.canceraustralia.nbcc.org.au

Cheeky Checkup

Website: www.cheekycheckup.com.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS Medicine Wise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts.

Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Your Self Care Pharmacy: