

## **Cervical Cancer Screening Guidelines-Pap Test**

Widespread use of the Pap test as a screening tool has dramatically reduced cervical cancer mortality rates in the United States. In March 2013 new recommendations for the timing and frequency of cervical cancer screening were issued. A review of the evidence suggested that a later and less frequent screening with the Pap test prevents cervical cancer just as well and avoids some unnecessary and potentially harmful interventions. The new recommendations are as follows:

- Cervical cancer screening should begin at age 21
- Most women under the age of 30 should be screened every two to three years
- Women age 30 and older should be co-tested (Pap and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) testing) every three to five years
- Women older than 65 can stop screening if they have had three or more negative Pap tests in a row and no abnormal Pap results in the previous ten years
- Women who have had a hysterectomy (removal of the cervix and uterus) can stop Pap testing unless their hysterectomy was due to abnormal Pap findings
- HPV vaccinated women should follow the same cervical cancer screening guidelines as unvaccinated women

There are some women with certain risk factors that need to be screened more frequently. This is a conversation you need to have with your health care provider. They will help determine what your individual risk factors are and how often you need to be screened.

While these recommendations have changed regarding Pap testing, it is still the consensus that women do need a yearly pelvic exam. An external exam to check for skin cancer of the vulva is important. The exam known as a "bimanual" is done to evaluate the internal reproductive organs (uterus, ovaries, cervix, and vagina).