

Cervical Cancer Screening

When to start and stop screening

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) and decision points for providers to assist a woman's choice for initiating and discontinuing Pap testing.

What factors should be considered to determine when to initiate screening?

- Risk factors include: multiple sexual partners, sexual debut in early teens or younger, smoking, no HPV vaccination
- Protective factors include: HPV vaccination, sexual debut in 20s or older, low number of sexual partners, non-smoking

How should I advise women under 21 years of age requesting to be screened?

- Screening is not recommended under 21 years of age; the evidence is clear that the harms outweigh the benefits.
- For women with several risk factors/few protective factors, it may be prudent to start screening at a younger age (i.e., somewhere between 20 and 24 years of age).

How should I advise women between 21 and 24 years of age asking about starting screening now versus waiting until 25 years of age?

- There is no specific age in which screening should commence between the ages of 21 and 29.
- It is important to consider the woman's risk factors, protective factors, values and preferences in this age group.
- For most (average risk) women, screening can start between the ages of 25 and 29.
- Women 21-24 years of age who may be at higher risk could start screening as early as age 21.
- Women who may be at lower risk could initiate screening as early as 25 years of age or as late as 30 (if they choose to do so). Screening before 25 years of age is unlikely to be beneficial.

Women between 25 and 29 years of age want to know if they need to start cervical cancer screening now or if they can wait.

- It is important to consider the woman's risk factors, protective factors, values and preferences in this age group.
- Women who have few risk factors/several protective factors could initiate screening as late as 30 years of age.

Some women in my practice are older than 69 and wish to continue being screened even though they have had regular screening for the last 10 years.

- The decision to stop screening should be a personal one based on the woman's life expectancy, quality of life, personal values and understanding the challenges of screening beyond this age.
- Challenges include: estrogen depletion, pain, difficulty obtaining samples, false positive results.