

Changes to the National Cervical Screening Program

What are the changes in a nutshell?

There are three main changes coming to Australia's National Cervical Screening Program in 2017.

1. The program will change from conducting Pap smear tests (which look for abnormal cells) to a test that looks for HPV (the human papillomavirus – a virus that causes almost all cervical cancers). This means that we are catching what could eventually turn into cervical cancer one step earlier. The changes will happen in the lab – the procedure to collect cells from the cervix for testing will stay the same.
2. Women will only need to be tested every five years, instead of every two. The new HPV test is more accurate and effective, and for that reason, women don't need to have it as frequently as a Pap smear test.
3. Previously, it was recommended that women start screening at age 18-20 – the new recommendation will be to start at age 25. That decision has been supported by Cancer Council NSW research, which looked at cervical cancer rates since the start of the organised National Cervical Screening Program in 1991.

Rates had not changed at all in young women aged 25 and younger. That was in huge contrast to the older women, where squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and overall cervical cancer rates have declined dramatically, almost halving since its inception, showing that screening women from age 25 is very effective at preventing cervical cancer, but screening before the age of 25 appears to not be effective. Details about this rationale can be found in the accompanying [press release](#).

The new program is expected to start on 1 December 2017.

We will update this website with new key messages, resources and links when they become available.