



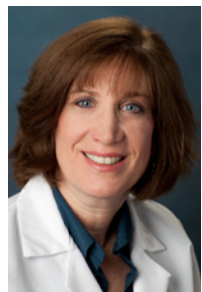
# Cervical Cancer

In 2009, medical guidelines recommending annual Pap smears for sexually active women over the age of 21 were changed. Here's what you need to know.



by **KenMcEntee**  
Contributing Writer

**M**ost women are surprised to learn that cervical cancer screening—formally known as a Pap smear—no longer needs to be done annually, says Shirley Bennett, MD, an obstetrician/gynecologist on the Medical Staff at Southwest General.



Shirley Bennett, MD

“When I tell my patients that they only need a Pap smear every three years, they look at me like I’m crazy,” Dr. Bennett says. “For some reason, new guidelines for mammograms have received a lot of attention in the press, but few people seem

to know about the new Pap screening guidelines.”

Although cervical cancer is the leading cause of death from cancer in women under the age of 50, it is also one of the most preventable cancers because of the diagnostic effectiveness of Pap smears.

In 2009, medical guidelines

recommending annual Pap smears for sexually active women over the age of 21 were changed. The new guidelines were developed by the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force, American Cancer Society and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

The new guidelines recommend:

- Pap smear screening starting at the age of 21, regardless of the onset of sexual activity. Previously, screening was recommended two years after the onset of sexual activity or the age of 21, whichever came first.
- Between the ages of 21 and 29 screening is recommended every two years.
- Screening intervals can be extended to every three years for women over the age of 30 who have no history of cancer or compromised immune systems. The screening should include a Pap smear as well as a test for high-risk types of Human Papillomavirus (HPV), which is the cause of most cases of cervical cancer. “If both tests are negative, you can go three years until the next one,” Dr. Bennett explains.
- Following a hysterectomy that is not cancer related, Pap smears may be discontinued.

• Pap smears should be discontinued in women between the ages of 65 and 70 if they have had three negative tests in a row with no abnormal tests in 10 years.

**Although cervical cancer is the leading cause of death from cancer in women under the age of 50, it is also one of the most preventable cancers because of the diagnostic effectiveness of Pap smears.**

The wider time increments between Pap smears concern many women, but according to Dr. Bennett, there is no need to worry. The new recommendations are just as effective because of the additional screening for HPV, and it takes years for HPV to cause cervical cancer.

“Most of the time, HPV is transient, and

the body clears the virus away quickly,” says Dr. Bennett. “For those people who don’t clear away the virus, it will continue to show up in later exams. When a Pap smear comes back positive for abnormal cells, we follow up with a colposcopy, which is a procedure where we look at the cervix with magnification and take biopsies to evaluate if a further course of treatment is required.”

Dr. Bennett emphasizes that even though Pap smears can be done less frequently, annual breast and pelvic exams are still necessary.

Be sure to discuss any physical concerns or questions about screenings with your obstetrician/gynecologist.

*Dr. Bennett is an obstetrician/gynecologist on the Medical Staff at Southwest General. She provides care for women from adolescence through menopause. She has special interests in minimally invasive surgery, endometrial ablation, obstetrics and abnormal Pap smears. For more information, contact Health Connection at 440-816-5050.*



For Southwest General updates and event happenings follow us at **“SouthwestGeneralHospital.”**