

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian women encouraged to take part in new cervical screening program

Cancer Council is encouraging eligible Australian women to take part in the renewed national cervical cancer screening program which starts today (1 December). The new program is expected to reduce deaths from the disease by at least 20 percent.

The screening program, offered by the Australian Government, will see a five-yearly Cervical Screening Test for women aged 25 to 74 replacing the old two-yearly Pap test previously offered from age 18. The new, more sophisticated test will look for the presence of the virus that causes almost all cervical cancer – the human papillomavirus, or HPV and is expected to lower cervical cancer cases and mortality by at least 20%.

Professor Karen Canfell, the Chair of Cancer Council Australia's Screening and Immunisation Committee, says the renewed program will deliver increased health benefits from fewer interventions.

"The old Pap smear was conducted every two years and looked for abnormalities in cells from the cervix. The new test is more sophisticated in that it allows scientists to look for the virus that, if left untreated, can cause the cell changes that can lead to cervical cancer.

"By detecting the main precursor to cervical cancer we can help prevent more cancer cases from occurring, and take action sooner."

Professor Canfell said that while the procedure will feel the same for women, the good news is that the test only needs to be conducted once every five years.

"A more accurate test means that women won't need to be screened as often. Most importantly, the new program is expected to save lives. Cancer Council research shows that the new program will reduce cervical cancer cases and deaths by at least 20 per cent. Overall this is excellent news for Australian women."

Professor Canfell said that women need to remember that even if they have been vaccinated for HPV they should still get screened – and if they were overdue for a test, not to delay having it done.

"All eligible women, regardless of whether or not they have been vaccinated for HPV, should take part in the cervical screening program. And any woman who experiences any symptoms such as bleeding, pain or discharge should see a GP straight away, regardless of their age or when their last test was."

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