

Media Release

Updated guidelines prepare health professionals for cervical screening ‘game-changer’

Updated national cervical cancer clinical guidelines now provide the latest advice on the expanded eligibility to screen via self-collection, preparing health professionals for upcoming changes to the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP).

From 1 July 2022, self-collection of NCSP tests will be available for everyone who is eligible for cervical screening, making it easier to participate, especially for people who screen at low rates.

The expansion of self-collection was announced late last year, following a recommendation from the Medical Services Advisory Committee with subsequent guidelines commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Professor Marion Saville AM, Chair of Cancer Council Australia’s Cervical Screening Guideline Working Group, said, “The guidelines make clear that where an HPV test is needed, self-collection should be an option.”

“When self-collection becomes widely available in July, it will be a gamechanger and will give health professionals the flexibility to best meet the needs of patients”.

The updated guidelines bring together the best available evidence to prevent, diagnose and manage cervical cancer, providing recommendations for health care professionals with patients in specific situations, such as in people displaying symptoms and in some follow-up settings, where a co-test (HPV test and a cytology test) is required.

“Importantly, the guidelines acknowledge that those who prefer to have a screening sample collected by a doctor can continue to do so, as well as detail instances where self-collection is unsuitable and a practitioner collected sample is required,” said Professor Saville.

“We hope that by providing these updated guidelines in advance, we can facilitate communication and education initiatives to ensure all health professionals, including those in primary care, specialist services and laboratories, feel supported and ready to implement this change on 1 July”.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Dr Tanya Buchanan said, “Universal self-collection offers more Australians more choice and control in their healthcare.”

“Currently, only around 63% of eligible women are up-to-date with the screening recommended by the NCSP. The expansion of self-collection aims to increase participation and equitably accelerate Australia’s progress towards the elimination of cervical cancer.”

The guidelines come into effect on 1 July 2022, and are available at: www.cancer.org.au/clinical-guidelines/cervical-cancer-screening

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