

January is National Cervical Health Awareness Month

Most women know that a Pap smear can detect cervical cancer, but do they know how often to have one?

Health Quarters offers affordable cervical cancer screening and prevention services such as Pap smears, HPV tests, the HPV vaccine for girls and boys ages 9 to 26, and colposcopy at its medical offices in Beverly, Haverhill, and Lawrence. In recognition of National Cervical Health Awareness Month, we're presenting the most recent screening guidelines from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

Health Quarters provides Pap smears, tests that collect cells from the cervix as part of a routine gynecological exam, and in-office colposcopies if abnormal cells are discovered. During a colposcopy tissue samples may be taken and laboratory analysis performed to look for pre-cancerous or cancerous changes.

In addition, Health Quarters will perform tests for the Human papillomavirus (also called HPV), the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD) in the United States. The test may be recommended if a Pap smear shows abnormal cells or if the client is age 30 or older. Since 2007, HQ has administered the HPV vaccine to young women in an effort to prevent the four strains of HPV that are responsible for up to 70% of all cases of cervical cancer and 90% of genital warts.

The following are the latest ACOG screening guidelines:

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Screening and Prevention Recommendations</u>
Age 9 - 26	Get the HPV vaccine, available now to boys as well as girls
Under age 21	First Pap smear no sooner than age 21
Age 21 - 29	Regular Pap every two years
Age 30 or older	Women with three normal Paps in a row may get screened every three years. A best practice is to receive a Pap smear <i>and</i> the HPV test. Screening will be done no more frequently than every three years for women with normal results on both tests.
Age 70 or older	Women with three normal Paps in a row and no abnormal Pap results in the last 10 years may choose to stop screening. Check with a doctor.

While many women will no longer need an annual Pap smear, they are strongly encouraged to continue to schedule a preventive annual exam in order to receive a breast exam, contraception if appropriate, blood pressure measurement, preconception counseling, and pelvic exam to check the ovaries. At HQ, we try to ensure that our clients receive a routine screening for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) chlamydia and gonorrhea. Because both STDs usually have no symptoms in women, clients may not be aware of an infection, which could lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility. Regular preventive care is the cornerstone of good reproductive health.

Since cervical cancer is caused by a sexually transmitted virus, the risk may be reduced if a person follows these prevention tips:

- Gets the HPV vaccine
- Delays sexual intercourse until 20 years of age or older
- Has only one sex partner who doesn't have an STD and is monogamous
- Limits the number of sex partners
- Always uses latex condoms to protect against STDs
- Avoids smoking