Cervical Cancer Screening (Pap test)

In 2005, 80% of Ontario women (ages 20-69) reported being screened at least once for cervical cancer in the past three years. Screening rates have gone down slightly since 2001 and remain virtually unchanged since 2003. More needs to be done to ensure access to all women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>As of this report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rates of Pap tests in screen-eligible women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What's new this year?
Last year results were reported using Pap test data from Cytobase, an Ontario Pap test registry. This report will be refreshed later this year to show the updated analysis from this source and the Ontario Health Insurance Program database. In the interim, this report currently shows self-reported data among screen-eligible women from the Canadian Community Health Survey.

See table next page.
What do the results show?

- 80% of Ontario women (ages 20-69) reported having at least one Pap test in the previous three years in 2005. *Figure 1*
- 20% of Ontario women are seldom or never screened. These women tend to be the most vulnerable - women living in poverty, Aboriginal women, and those who have newly arrived from countries with high HPV infection rates.
- There has been no improvement in Pap test rates since 2000/01. The 2005 self-reported rates of cervical screening (80%) appear to be slightly lower than those for 2003 (81%) and 2000/01 (82%). This decrease is not statistically significant. *Figure 1*
• Regionally, the self-reported Pap test rates ranged from 75% in Toronto Central to 87% in Champlain. Only South West and Champlain LHINs had significantly higher Pap test rates than Ontario as a whole; no LHINs had significantly lower rates. Figure 1

Why is this important to patient care?
• Cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable through screening. Regular screening with Pap tests is the major reason for the long-term declines in cervical cancer incidence and mortality rates.¹
• Cervical cancer is relatively uncommon among Ontario women overall – yet among those 20-49 years, it ranks second to breast cancer.¹ In 2006, 510 Ontario women were diagnosed with, and 150 died, of cervical cancer.
• The Ontario Cervical Screening Program recommends annual Pap tests three years in a row for women up to the age 70 who are, or have been, sexually active. If test results are normal for all three, Pap tests should be done every 2-3 years thereafter. (See Screening Practice Guidelines)²
• Cancer Care Ontario’s goal is a 95% screening rate among women ages 20-69. This would ideally be accomplished in an organized cervical cancer screening program as proposed in the Cancer 2020 report.³
• Organized cervical cancer screening programs are generally more effective and efficient than ad hoc screening.⁴
• The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has recommended immunization for Canadian girls and women (ages 9-26) to protect against HPV.⁵ However, regular Pap tests are still recommended for all women who have ever been sexually active, regardless of their vaccination status. Current HPV vaccines protect against only two of the many high-risk types of HPV that can cause cancer.
• This indicator is a Federal Provincial Territorial (FPT) performance indicator. FPT measures were established for comparability across provinces and territories and to increase accountability.⁶
How does Ontario compare?

• There is some variation in Canadian self-reports of Pap test rates among women ages 20-69 during the past three years (corrected for hysterectomies). Rates range from around 87% in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island to a low of 75% in Quebec. Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia are among the provinces with comparatively low rates.

What is being done?

• Overwhelming epidemiologic evidence has confirmed that infection with high-risk types of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer and its precursors. HPV is a virus that is usually acquired through intimate sexual activity. Persistent infection with HPV can lead to cancer of the cervix if precancerous lesions are not found and treated. Most women who have been exposed to HPV do not develop cancer of the cervix.

• The federal government recently announced $300 million in funding to launch a national HPV vaccine program.

• Cancer Care Ontario recommends the following 4 steps for improving cervical cancer screening and implementing an HPV vaccination program:
  1. Implement a comprehensive cervical screening information system integrated with HPV vaccination information
  2. Implement HPV testing in Ontario to better triage women with initial abnormal Pap test results, and reduce the need for colposcopy in many women
  3. Implement targeted, community-based and culturally-sensitive outreach programs to reach women who are under-screened or never screened and educate high risk groups about cervical cancer prevention and detection
  4. Implement targeted, community-based and culturally-sensitive outreach programs to reach women who are under-screened or never screened and educate high risk groups about cervical cancer prevention and detection

Technical Information

Definition

• Percentage of women (ages 20-69) who reported having had a Pap test in the last three years, Ontario, 2000/01, 2003, 2005
• Women who reported having had a hysterectomy are excluded
Data Sources

- Canadian Community Health Survey

Data Quality

Completeness

- Self-reported rates are likely too high, mainly because women tend to underestimate the time since last Pap test.

Notes