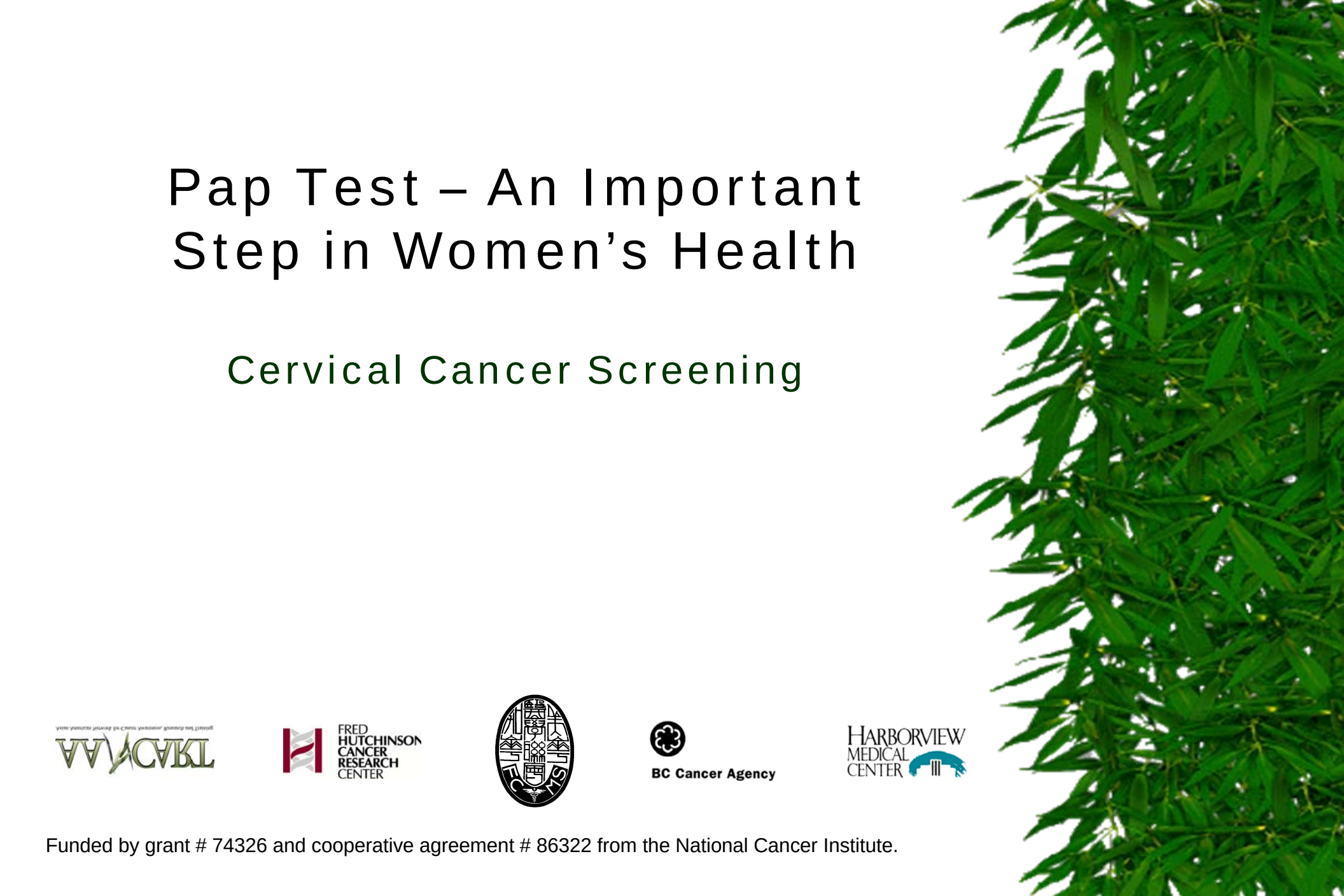
Pap Test – An Important Step in Women's Health

Cervical Cancer Screening



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A Woman's Life Requires Balancing Important Responsibilities

Health

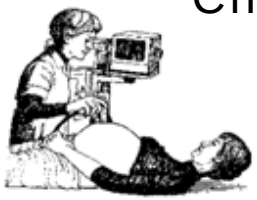
Family

Work

Taking care of her health is key

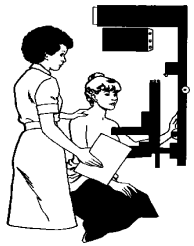
Add a Periodic Health Exam to Your Seasonal Routine

Chinese New Year



Health Checkups

Christmas



Mid-Autumn Festival

A Pap test is an important part of a periodic health exam for women

What Is a Pap Test?

A Pap test **is a simple procedure which involves gently scraping some cells from the surface of the cervix and putting them on a slide. The cells are examined under a microscope to see if they are normal.**

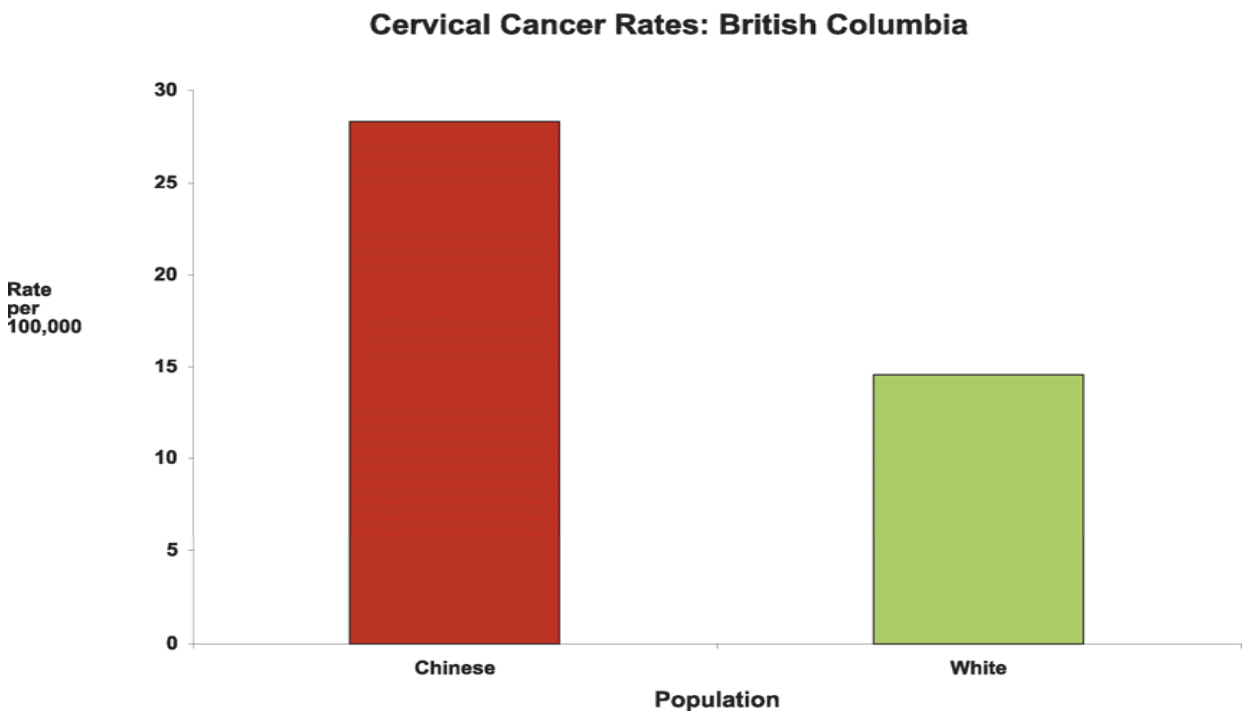
Why is Pap Testing Important?

- **Cells in the lining of the cervix may gradually change from normal to precancer to cancer, usually over several years**
- **Pre and early cancerous changes in the cervix can be found by the Pap test (also called the “Pap smear”)**
- **Since precancers and very early cervical cancers are nearly 100% curable, this test can prevent nearly all deaths from cervical cancer**
- **Early cervical cancer or precancers usually show no symptoms or signs**

Facts About Cervical Cancer

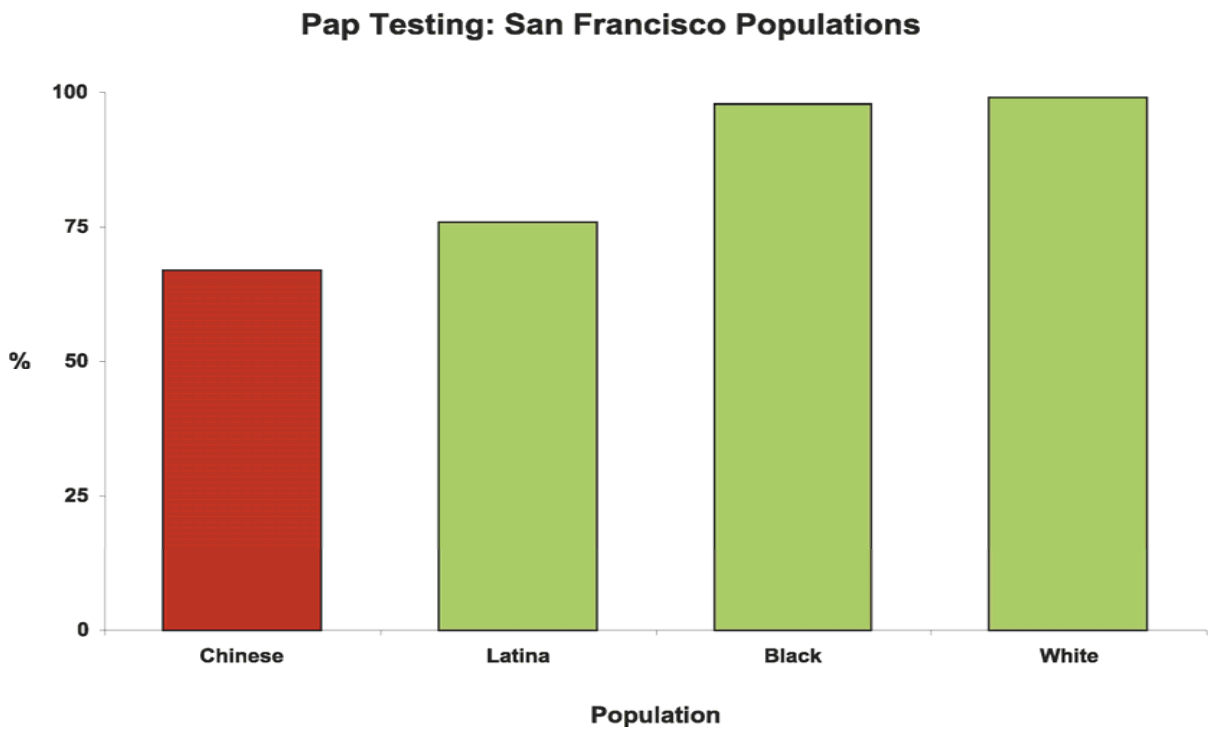
- **It was once one of the most common causes of cancer deaths in women**
- **It can affect women of all ages**
- **Since the Pap test was introduced in the 1940s, the number of cervical cancer deaths in North America has dropped**
- **Despite the benefits of Pap testing, not all women take advantage of it**
- **Most of the women who were diagnosed with cervical cancer in the year 2000 had not had a Pap test in the past 5 years**
- **Cervical cancer is preventable!**

Chinese Women Have Higher Rates of Cervical Cancer



Cervical cancer deaths are higher in populations around the world where women do not have access to routine Pap tests. These cases are usually diagnosed at an invasive late stage, rather than as precancers or early cancers.

Rate of Pap Testing Among Chinese women

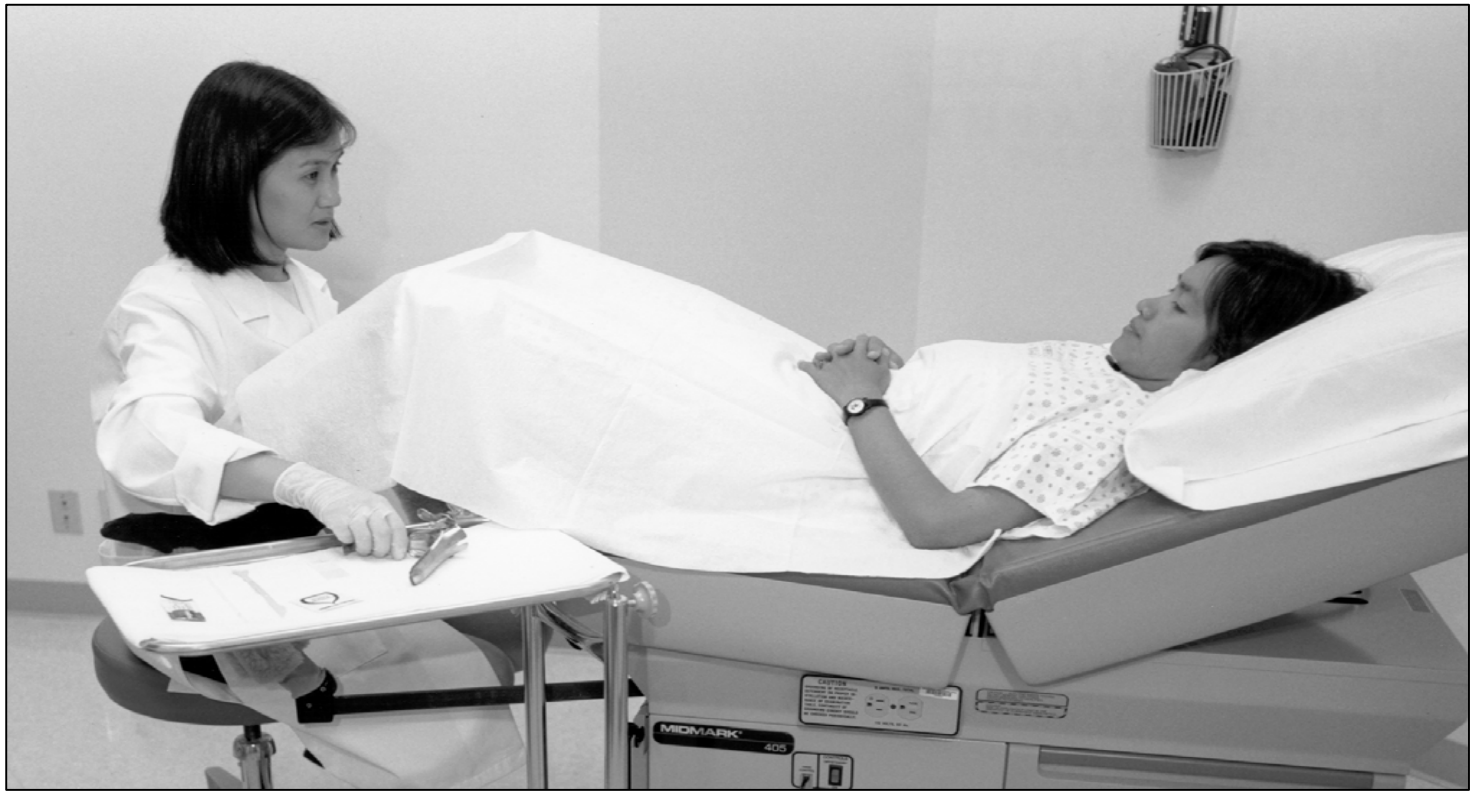


Lack of knowledge or awareness of routine Pap testing is an important factor, particularly among many immigrant populations in the USA and Canada.

What Causes Cervical Cancer?

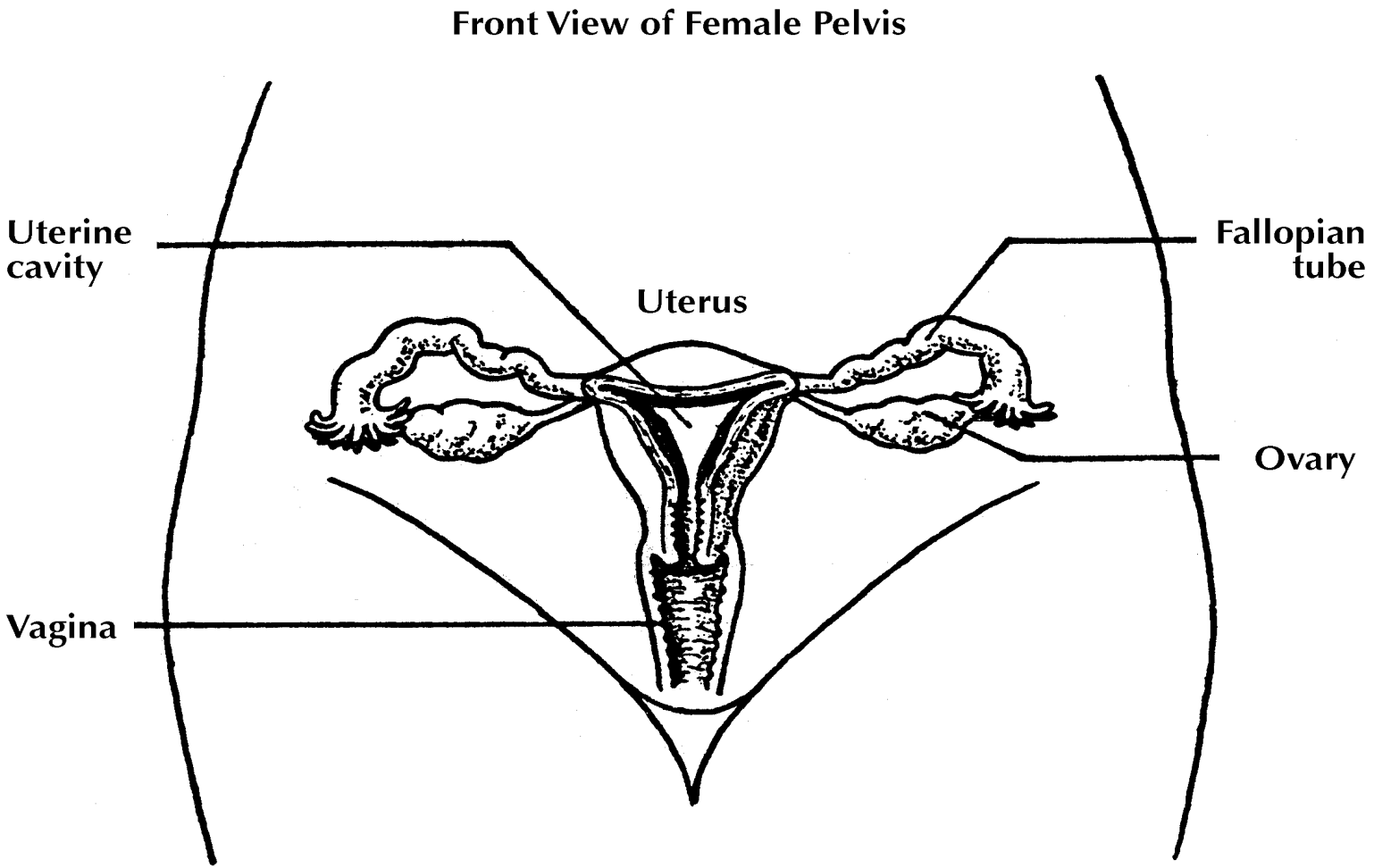
- **Usually caused by a virus**
- **Affects women of all ages who have been sexually active**

How Is the Pap Test Done?



The doctor uses a speculum to help hold open the vaginal entrance to the cervix. A Pap test is done at this time.

What is a Pelvic Exam?



What is a Pelvic Exam?

- **The doctor checks the pelvic area by inspecting and using a gloved hand to feel the uterus, vagina, cervix, and ovaries for any abnormalities**
- **A pelvic exam is useful to detect:**
  - **Signs of infection in the vagina or uterus**
  - **Changes in the uterus and ovaries such as abnormal growths**
  - **Abnormal changes in the cervix**

Who Should Get a Pap Test?

Canadian Guidelines

- **All women who are or have been sexually active, and are under 70 years old**

Who Should Get a Pap Test?

United States Guidelines

- **All women over 18 years old**
- **All women who are or have been sexually active**

When to Begin Pap Tests? How Often?

Canadian Guidelines

- **Begin getting Pap tests when you start to be sexually active**
- **Pap testing should be done every year**
- **If three or more annual Pap tests have been normal, then Pap testing should be done at least every two years until age 69**
- **Women who have had previous abnormal Pap tests (including those treated) should continue to have Pap tests done annually**

When to Begin Pap Tests? How Often?

United States Guidelines

- **Begin getting annual Pap tests when you start to be sexually active, or if you are at least 18 years old**
- **If three or more annual Pap tests have been normal, then Pap testing may be done less frequently if recommended by the doctor**

Risk Factors

Who Are More Likely to Get Cervical Cancer?

- **Sexually transmitted disease**
- **Sexual intercourse at an early age**
- **Many sexual partners, or having one partner who has had many sexual partners**
- **Smoking**
- **No regular Pap testing**

Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test

Mrs. Leung

“I am 56 years old, and spend most of my time doing housework and taking care of my children. I have been blessed with good health all my life. My husband, my children and grandchildren are also healthy. I cook ‘*bou’* (replenishing) soups, take anti-cancer herbs and do light exercise whenever possible. I observed the sitting month rituals and practice women’s health hygiene. I heard my friends and daughters talk about Pap testing, but I don’t think women like me need one.”

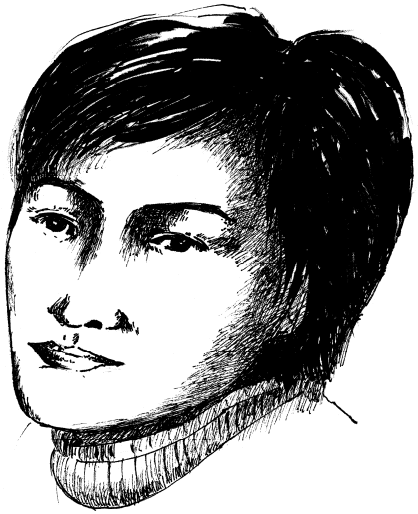
Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test

Mrs. Leung

What you should know :

- **Women can develop cervical cancer at any age**
- **All women, healthy or not, rich or poor are at risk**
- **Herbal medicines and a healthy diet, while desirable, do not protect against cervical cancer**

Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test



Annie

“My husband, an assistant cook for a Chinese restaurant, and I have three young children. We are very busy working to support our family. The last Pap test I had was over five years ago. I was overdue for another one but was too busy to make it to the doctor’s office. I am concerned about not getting Pap tests regularly but at least I had one before.”

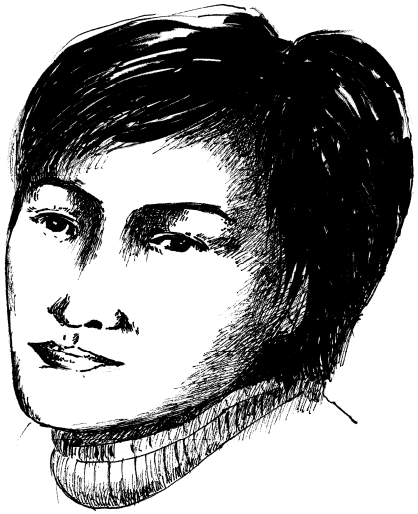
Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test

Annie

What you should know :

- **Pap testing must be done regularly to detect abnormal changes early, when they can be more successfully treated**
- **Women with early precancerous changes in the cervix have no symptoms, so it is important to get Pap tests regularly, even when you feel healthy**
- **It is important to take the time to have a Pap test – it may save your life!**

Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test



Annie and Her Mom

“My mom never gets a Pap test. She keeps saying that she does not need one because she is old, no longer has periods, and has stopped having a sex life since my father died. She feels too embarrassed to let a doctor examine her ‘down there.’ Also, she is scared of hearing bad news about the Pap test result. I believe my mom should have a Pap test. In fact, I will go so that she can go with me.”

Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test

Annie and Her Mom

What you should know :

- **Many cervical cancers occur in women who are post-menopausal and who are no longer sexually active**
- **Cervical cancer can be prevented if precancerous cells are detected and destroyed**
- **It is better to know if you have cervical cancer so it can be treated early**

Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test

Mrs. Hu

“I had cervical cancer and feel fortunate to have my normal life back. If it was not for my friend, Mrs. Yip, who convinced me to have a Pap test, my cancer would not have been discovered and treated. I am now 64 years old and happy that I have lived to see my grand children and great-grandchildren.”

“After living through the ordeal, I want to tell all women the importance of getting a Pap test. It is one thing we can do to take care of our health. Even now, no matter how busy I am with housework and babysitting, I will never skip my Pap test appointment. The Pap test gives me peace of mind.”

Common Misunderstandings About the Pap Test

Mrs. Hu

What you should know :

- **Compared to other concerns, cervical cancer is relatively easy to detect and treat**
- **Cervical cancer is 99% curable if it is detected very early**

Frequently Asked Questions
Vaginal Discharge

If I have no problems with vaginal discharge, do I need a Pap test?

Yes. Even though you do not have symptoms, you could have cervical cancer. Many women with cervical cancer do not have any discharge.

Frequently Asked Questions
Sexually Transmitted Diseases

If I have never had a sexually transmitted disease, do I need to have a Pap test?

Yes. It is true that women who have had sexually transmitted diseases are more likely to get cervical cancer. However, many women with cervical cancer have never had a sexually transmitted disease.

Frequently Asked Questions
Older Age

If I am old, my husband is dead, and I am no longer menstruating, why do I have to worry about cervical cancer?

Unfortunately, cervical cancer is more common among older women. It is true that problems with sexually transmitted diseases drop off, but cancer remains a concern.

Frequently Asked Questions
Cure

Can cervical cancer be cured?

Precancerous changes in the cervix are almost always curable. Treatment is simple and is done within minutes under a local anesthetic. It does not require hospitalization and a woman's fertility is unaffected. Abnormal cells are removed by freezing (cryotherapy), laser, or minor surgery (cone biopsy).

Cervical cancer cure rates vary, depending on stage of disease and whether the cancer has become invasive. Detection at an early stage greatly improves the chance of cure. Treatment usually include surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy.

Frequently Asked Questions
Regular Testing

Why do they have to look regularly, rather than just once?

Cervical cancer can start at any time. For this reason, doctors usually check the cervix regularly to make certain that it is normal.

Frequently Asked Questions
Medical Insurance (USA)

What do I do if I don't have medical insurance or I'm not sure that my insurance covers the Pap test?

Most health care plans, including Medicaid and Medicare, do cover Pap tests.

Frequently Asked Questions
English Language

If I don't speak English that well, how will I understand what the doctor is telling me?

Some clinics have doctors and staff who speak Chinese. Others have trained, confidential medical interpreters. You can request an interpreter when you make your appointment.

Frequently Asked Questions
Who Performs the Test

Do I get the Pap test from a gynecologist?

Both primary care physicians and gynecologists do Pap tests.

Most routine Pap tests are performed by primary care physicians.

Frequently Asked Questions

Relaxing the Pelvic Muscles

Is getting the Pap test painful?

Pap tests should not be painful. Some women may be uncomfortable if the speculum is too big. You can ask the doctor to use a smaller speculum. Sometimes, it helps if you try to relax the pelvic muscles during the Pap test.

Frequently Asked Questions

Male versus Female Doctor

I have a male doctor and feel embarrassed about getting a Pap test from him. Can I ask to see a female doctor just for my Pap test?

Most male physicians perform Pap testing for their female patients. However, if you do not feel comfortable, you should speak to your regular doctor about arranging a Pap test appointment with a female provider.

Final Points to Remember...

- **Health is very precious to you and your family**
- **Taking time to care for your health is important**
- **Get Pap tests done regularly as part of your periodic health check**
- **Cervical cancer is preventable with routine Pap tests**
- **Prevention is the best medicine!**