

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What are the latest guidelines about Pap cancer screening tests?



DR. GEORGE KOVACEVIC

Congratulations to women in America. Since the 1980s you have achieved a 75 percent reduction in cervical cancer, making the Pap smear one of the most successful cancer screening programs ever. This result was, in large part, due to the acceptance and adherence by women of the annual Pap smear.

Cervical cancer rates in the U.S. are at a low of seven in every 100,000 and compare favorably with Great Britain's rate of 8.5 in every 100,000 where a Pap every three years is the standard.

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Recently, multiple professional organizations in the U.S. revised the guidelines for Pap smear screening. The new recommendations are:

» **Age 21-29:** First pap at age 21. Pap every two to three years if normal HR HPV negative

» **Age 30-65:** Women at low risk and a history of normal Paps with HR HPV negative may consider screening every

three years.

» **Age 65-plus:** May consider stopping Pap smears if there is a history of three consecutive normal Paps and no risk factors.

To determine the best frequency for Pap smear screening, I recommend women talk to their physicians to assess their individual risk factors and to optimize each woman's individual Pap screening schedule.

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