

Cervical Self-Sampling: Is Canada Ready?



STATEMENT OF SUPPORT:

"The CMA supports public awareness campaigns to help patients understand the benefits of HPV vaccines. The CMA recognizes vaccination as a key aspect of overall health care."

Self-sampling for HPV is a process where individuals can collect their own vaginal sample using brushes or swabs and send it to a laboratory for processing to determine if HPV is present.

According to the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, research suggests that the test results from patient-collected samples are of comparable accuracy to clinician-collected samples in detecting moderately-severe abnormal cervical lesions.

"The great aim of education is not knowledge but action."

- Herbert Spencer

What are the main benefits of cervical self-sampling?

1. Increased participation in cervical screening programs by patients who have been under-screened or never screened.
2. Better patient experience.
3. Improved convenience for screening participants compared to clinician-collected samples.

However, cervical self-sampling doesn't come without challenges. Many of these challenges could be effectively mitigated with a thoughtful implementation process. These challenges include:

1. **A low number of completed and returned self-sampling kits.** This may be addressed through education on how to perform self-sampling.
2. **Self-sampling cannot be used for triage of cytology.** Patients need to be connected to primary care for follow-up.
3. **Privacy.** Packages can be mailed in plain packaging.
4. **Cost.** An opt-in approach can be used where patients can request kits to help lower costs.
5. **Over screening.** The registry for cervical screening needs to be linked to both self-screening participants as well as clinician-collected samples.
6. **Regulatory barriers.** All commercial HPV kits and tests need to be validated.

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One of the lingering questions, accepting the logistics as being overall very helpful, is around the accuracy of the testing.

In 2021, the Canada Drug and Health Technology Agency (CADTH) conducted a report looking at 10 different studies to answer this important question regarding accuracy. In the [Horizon Scan](#), which was completed in collaboration with the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (CPAC), CADTH examined the available evidence on the use of self-sampling devices for HPV testing. Evidence presented in the report indicates that self-sampling is generally as accurate as clinician-collected sampling for HPV testing. The report's findings are promising as they contribute to the progress of [Canada's action plan](#) to eliminate cervical cancer in our country by 2040.

What is happening in other countries? Australia, Finland, and the Netherlands all have various programs in place. While eligibility is different depending on the country, there is a growing effort to provide more broad-based programs to all eligible screening participants and decrease restrictions to access.

In Canada, British Columbia has taken a lead role with the expertise of Dr. Gina Ogilvie (Tier 1 Canada research chair in global control of HPV-related diseases and prevention), the University of British Columbia, and affiliate scientist, BC Cancer. BC Cancer launched a pilot program in 2021 in Central Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast. By decreasing barriers such as cultural issues, trauma, inconvenient clinic hours, transportation concerns, the need for time off work or for childcare, the goal was to have better uptake and better screening. That program was successful. Now, in January 2024, the program is being offered throughout the province. Patients can choose self-sampling or clinician-collection according to their personal preference.

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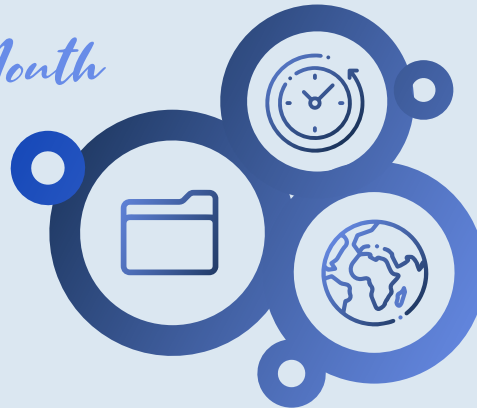


Simply stated, screening is essential as we are not yet at the juncture of widespread vaccination. Public engagement may be part of the long-term solution, but many unanswered questions still exist. Our goal is to decrease cancer rates by primary prevention, vaccination, and improved secondary prevention, cervical screening. We need to address both issues urgently.

Clark, Michelle, Horton, Jennifer, CADTH Horizon Study: Self-Sampling Devices for HPV Testing, Canadian Journal of Health Technologies, December 2021 Volume 1, Issue 12

Resource Of The Month

WHO recommendations on self-care interventions



Back in Time

Arsenic, sulphur, and mercury were commonly used to treat venereal disease in the 18th and 19th centuries resulting in serious side effects and death by poisoning.



Around the Globe

[Expanded HPV vaccination program for boys and adolescents to launch in Estonia starting next February | Sotsiaalministeerium \(sm.ee\)](#)

Did You Know?

Globally, cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women, with 604,000 new cases in 2020. About 90% of the 342,000 deaths caused by cervical cancer occurred in low and middle-income countries. The highest rates of cervical cancer incidence and mortality are in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Central America and South-East Asia.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/cervical-cancer>

Hot off the Press!

[No cervical cancer cases detected in vaccinated women following HPV immunisation.](#)

From Public Health Scotland

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Clinic Of The Month

Fatemeh Soleiman-Panah, BSc, BScP
Pharmacist/Owner of Sina Pharmacy & Health Centre in Vancouver, BC
Winner of the 2023 Collaborate Care Award from BCPhA

In our journey to deliver comprehensive healthcare, our pharmacy has taken a significant stride in the domain of preventive medicine, with a special focus on Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination. Recognizing the critical role of vaccinations in averting serious health conditions, we have established a multifaceted approach to make HPV vaccinations more accessible and informative for our community.

Central to our initiative is the collaboration with a dedicated team of doctors at our facility. These healthcare professionals are instrumental in directing patients to our pharmacy, where our skilled pharmacists are equipped to assess their eligibility for the HPV vaccine and administer it efficiently. This seamless integration between physicians and pharmacists ensures that patients receive a holistic and informed healthcare experience.

To further enhance accessibility, we have introduced an intuitive online booking system. This platform allows patients to conveniently schedule their HPV vaccination appointments, thereby removing barriers to vaccine access and encouraging timely immunization.

Understanding that education is key to informed health decisions, we actively engage with our patients at multiple touchpoints. Our pharmacists take the initiative to discuss the importance of the HPV vaccine during prescription pickups, particularly for those receiving contraceptive medications. This approach not only raises awareness, but also provides an opportunity for personalized consultation.

In our efforts to reach a broader audience, we have also implemented targeted email campaigns. These campaigns are designed to inform and update patients who have expressed interest in receiving health-related information from us. Through these emails, we delve into the benefits of the HPV vaccine, addressing common queries and misconceptions, thus empowering our patients with knowledge, and encouraging them to consider vaccination.

Our pharmacy is more than a point of care; it's a hub of health education and preventive services. By working hand-in-hand with healthcare professionals, leveraging technology for ease of access, and engaging in proactive patient education, we are committed to enhancing the well-being of our community. Together, we are not only administering vaccines; we are nurturing a healthier, well-informed society.