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Cervical Cancer Screening in the LGBTQ + Community: Dispelling Common Misconceptions and Improving Patient Comfort

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WAYS TO MAKE THE EXPERIENCE MORE COMFORTABLE



Consider aspects of the screening that may be particularly challenging for you and discuss these with your provider.

1. **Start with talking.** It is okay to start with a visit that is just a conversation.
2. **Tell your provider if you have never, or do not frequently have penis-in-vagina sex.** They can use a smaller speculum to improve comfort.
3. **Negotiate language.** For example, tell the provider "stop" means pause the exam and "out" means end the exam. Tell them if you would like to know what is going on during the exam, or if you prefer to be distracted.
4. **If you experience significant anxiety prior to or during screenings, ask your provider about sedation or relaxing medications.**
5. **Take a painkiller prior to and/or ask for a heating pad to use during the exam.**
6. **Wear comfortable clothes.** Keep your own clothes on for the exam from waist up.
7. **Ask to have another person stay for the visit** (i.e. support person, MA or RN).
8. **Ask your provider if you could insert the speculum yourself.** It may need to be adjusted.
9. **Distract yourself during the exam.** Use your cellphone or listen to music.
10. **Use relaxation techniques.** Focus on your breathing during the exam.

MOST IMPORTANTLY: *If you are ever uncomfortable during a visit, trust your instincts. It is never too late to end an encounter. Expect respect and empathy from your provider.*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PATIENTS TAKING TESTOSTERONE

Testosterone-induced atrophy of the vagina can make speculum placement more painful. It also increases the likelihood of unsatisfactory Pap results.

To improve comfort and likelihood of satisfactory results, patients may consider the use of topical estrogen for 1-2 weeks before screening. It comes in the form of a tablet, ring, or cream.

This will not counteract or reverse effects of gender-affirming testosterone therapy.

VERMONT DIVERSITY HEALTH PROJECT

Check out the Vermont Diversity Health Project to find practices committed to being a safe and affirming space for those in the LGBTQ+ community



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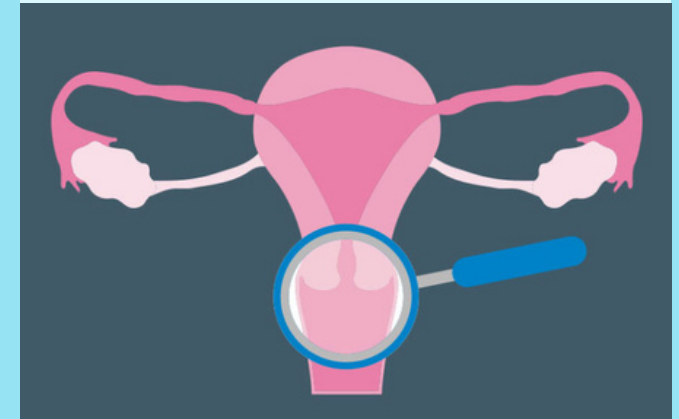
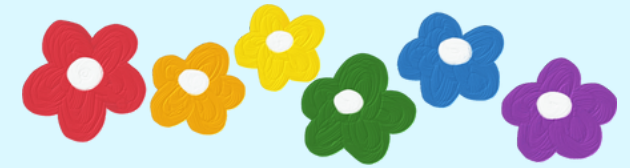


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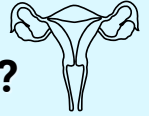
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Cervical Cancer Screening in the LGBTQ+ Community

What it is, who needs it, and ways to improve patient comfort

AM I AT RISK FOR CERVICAL CANCER?



Anyone with a cervix regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation is at risk for cervical cancer.

WHAT CAUSES CERVICAL CANCER?

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by viruses known as the human papillomaviruses (HPV).

HPV can enter cervical cells and cause them to change, potentially leading to cancer.

HOW IS HPV TRANSMITTED? IS IT COMMON?

HPV can be transmitted through any skin-to-skin or mouth-to-skin contact including vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

HPV is very common! Most sexually active people will have an HPV infection in their lifetime, and most do not cause cancer.

HOW CAN I REDUCE MY RISK?

Get vaccinated!



The HPV vaccine protects against the HPV types that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. Recommended for everyone through age 26.

Get screened!

Screening may detect changes in cervical cells years before they become cancer.

Screening starts at age 21-25* and continues through age 65 (may be recommended >65). It is recommended every 3-5 years; your provider may suggest more frequent testing depending on risk.

**Guidelines are changing. Speak with your provider for individual recommendations!*

Other ways to reduce risk:

Avoid tobacco products, use condoms during sex, and limit number of sexual partners as these all increase your chance of HPV infection.

HOW IS CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING DONE?

It includes the Pap test, HPV test, or both (co-testing). Both tests use cells taken from the cervix. These can be done in a provider's office or clinic.

Pap test: looks for changes on the cervix that have the possibility of becoming cancer.

HPV test: looks for the virus that causes these changes.

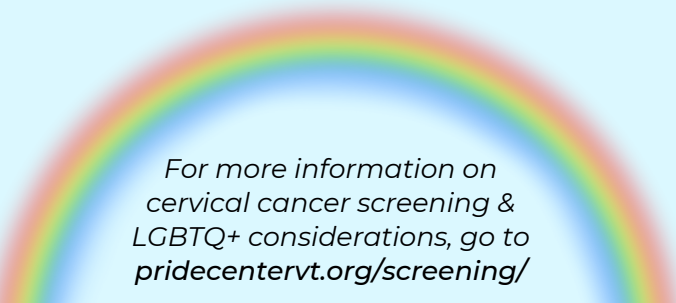
What to expect during a visit:

Patients lie on an exam table, with clothing removed from waist down. You will be provided with a cover or a gown.

A small instrument called a speculum is used to open the vagina and look at the cervix.

Cells are removed from the cervix with a sampling tool (usually a brush) and sent to a lab for testing.

The exam usually takes about 10 minutes.



For more information on cervical cancer screening & LGBTQ+ considerations, go to pridecentervt.org/screening/

