

The background is a gradient of blue and purple. A vertical white line runs down the center. On the right side, there are several overlapping white curved lines that form abstract, organic shapes. On the left side, there are also white curved lines, some of which are thicker and more prominent.

Preventative Women's
Health Care for Women
with Disabilities

Why is preventative women's health care important for women with disabilities?

Having a disability does not stop you from getting breast or cervical cancer, or becoming pregnant, or having sexually transmissible diseases or going through menopause. In fact, women with disabilities can have the same risks of developing health problems as other women in the community but in general they don't receive the same level of preventative health care.

Why do women with disabilities receive less preventative women's health care than other women?

There are many reasons for this:

- Women with disabilities may lack knowledge about their preventative health needs, or be embarrassed.
- General practitioners (GPs) and other health care providers may also have inadequate knowledge and training in this area.

- Stereotyping and negative attitudes may lead health professionals to believe that preventative health care is not necessary for women with disabilities.
- Barriers such as physical access problems, communication difficulties and limited financial resources may also prevent women with disabilities obtaining the preventative health care they need.

What has been done?

To overcome some of these barriers, the NSW Cervical Screening Program, in conjunction with the Centre for Developmental Disability Studies (CDDS), has developed guidelines for GPs to follow when providing preventative women's health care for women with disabilities.

The guidelines were based on a review of the research in this area, and in consultation with general practitioners, disability organisations, a women's advisory group and a focus group of women with disabilities.


What is in the Guidelines?

The guidelines provide GPs with practical information on how best to provide preventative women's health care for women with disabilities. The topics include:

- Communication strategies.
- Consent requirements.
- Recommendations for improving physical access.
- Practical tips for doing Pap tests for women with disabilities, including the use of alternative positions and instruments.
- General guidelines on breast screening, menstruation, sexual health, pregnancy choices and menopause.

What do I need to know about preventative women's health?

Remember, women with disabilities have just the same health needs as other women in the community. So:

- 
- If you are between the ages of 18-70 and have ever been sexually active, it is recommended that you have a Pap test every two years.
 - If you are 50 years and over, it is recommended that you have a screening mammography every two years. If you have a family history of breast cancer, you may need to start having mammograms at an earlier age. You should discuss this with your GP or BreastScreen NSW.
 - If you have never had periods, or had your periods later than usual, or have abnormal bleeding or excessive pain, don't assume that this is normal for a woman with a disability. Raise the issue with your doctor.
 - As a woman with a disability, you have the same right to contraceptive and pregnancy choices as other women.
 - Women with disabilities can be at greater risk of sexual harassment or assault. Seek help if this happens to you.
 - If you are getting symptoms of menopause such as hot flushes, see your GP for assessment and advice.

How can I get the most out of my visit to my GP?

When you make an appointment to see your GP to discuss your preventative women's health needs, be prepared for the visit, so you can get the most out of it.

- Book a long appointment so that you and your doctor will have enough time to cover all the important matters.
- When you make your appointment, find out if the surgery and the examination table are easy for you to access.
- Before the visit, write down (or have someone write down for you), all the questions you want to ask and issues you want to discuss.
- Make sure that you take a list of all your latest medications and a record of your medical history to the appointment.
- If someone is going with you to support you, make sure that it is someone who knows you well.
- If you use a communication device, take it with you and show your doctor how to use it.

- At the visit, make sure that the doctor understands what you are asking.
- If you are going to be examined or have a Pap test, show the doctor the most comfortable position for you.
- Sometimes, it may be more convenient for you to have the examination or test at home, in your own bed. If so, ask the doctor if this can be done.
- If the doctor recommends a particular treatment, ask if there are other alternatives, and the possible side effects of any treatment.

Can I see the Guidelines?

Yes. The Guidelines have been sent to the major disability organisations.

They are available on the websites of the NSW Cervical Screening Program and the Centre for Developmental Disability Studies and/or you may contact the NSW Cervical Screening Program for a hard copy of the Guidelines.

Contact details for the NSW Cervical Screening Program and the Centre for Developmental Disability Studies can be found on the back of this booklet.

For more information, contact:

NSW Cervical Screening Program
Locked Bag 7118, Parramatta BC 2150
Telephone +61 2 8838 2120
Facsimile +61 2 8838 2121
Website: www.csp.nsw.gov.au
Email: nswcsp@wsahs.nsw.gov.au

Centre for Developmental
Disability Studies
Royal Rehabilitation Centre
59 Charles Street, Ryde NSW 2112
PO Box 6, Ryde NSW 1680
Telephone +61 2 8878 0500
Facsimile +61 2 9807 7053
Website: www.cdds.med.usyd.edu.au/
Email: seetad@med.usyd.edu.au

NSW
CERVICAL
SCREENING
PROGRAM

CDDS
Centre for
Developmental
Disability
Studies