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NYC Vital Signs

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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Cervical Cancer Screening in New York City

Regular Pap tests can prevent cancer of the cervix (the opening to a woman's uterus) by finding abnormalities that can be treated before they become cancerous. In its early, most curable stages, cervical cancer has no symptoms. To increase its detection, Pap tests (also called Pap smears) are generally recommended every 1 to 3 years for adult women.

Despite the benefits of cervical cancer screening and treatment, 20% of women in

New York City say they do not get regular Pap tests. In 2004, there were 126 cervical cancer deaths among NYC women—70% of these occurred among women aged 50 or older. All of these deaths could have been prevented with proper screening and treatment.

This report focuses on the characteristics of NYC women who are not receiving recommended Pap tests and explores the reasons why they are not getting screened. Recommendations for improving screening are featured on page 4.

Foreign-born and low-income women are most likely to go unscreened

- Approximately 20% of New York City women report that they have not had a Pap test within the past 3 years.
- Women who are younger (18–24) or older (65+) are less likely to have had a Pap test than women aged 25–64.
- Asian women are the most likely to go without a Pap test (40%) at nearly twice the rate of white women (21%).
- Nearly twice as many foreign-born women report not having had a Pap test as women born in the U.S. Those least likely to get regular pap tests include women born in India (48% did not get screened), North or South Korea (46%), and China (43%).
- Single, never married women are more likely not to have had a recent Pap test than those who are married, in a steady relationship or no longer married.
- Women with lower levels of education are more likely to go without timely screening than those who graduated from college.
- Women living below the poverty level are more likely not to get regular Pap tests than those with higher incomes.

**Percent of NYC women
who have NOT had a Pap test within past 3 years**

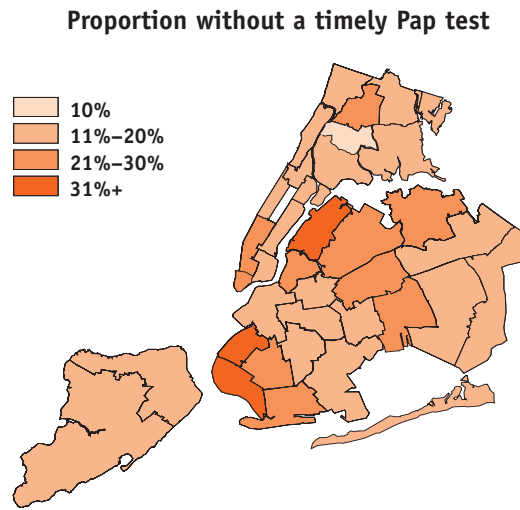
	Percent
Total	20
Age Group	
18–24	35
25–44	14
45–64	14
65+	31
Race/Ethnicity	
White	21
Black	13
Hispanic	17
Asian	40
Other	22
U.S.-born vs. Foreign-born	
U.S.*	16
Foreign-born	26
Marital Status	
Single	22
Married/Unmarried, in steady relationship	19
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	17
Education (among women aged 25+)	
Less than high school	23
High school graduate	19
Some college	16
College graduate	15
Household income	
Below federal poverty level	26
Less than 2 times the federal poverty level	22
Less than 4 times the federal poverty level	17
4 times the federal poverty level or more	14

* Includes Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories

Data presented in this report are based on results of the NYC Community Health Survey 2002–04, the annual telephone survey of adult New Yorkers, and the Citywide Health Survey, Spring 2003. For full survey details, see: nyc.gov/health/survey.

Low screening rates in some NYC neighborhoods

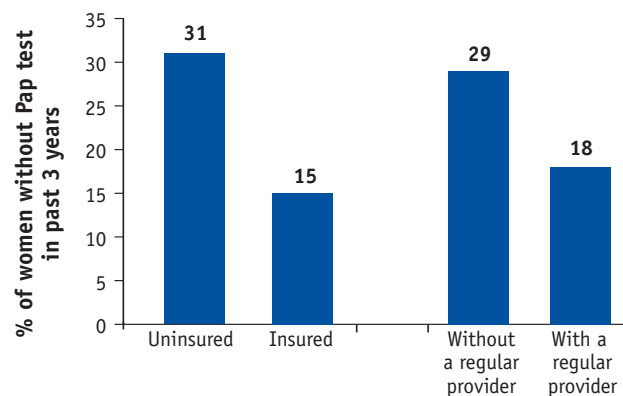
- In some neighborhoods, nearly 1 in 3 women has not had a timely Pap test: Sunset Park; Southwest Brooklyn; North Queens; Northwest Queens; and Southwest Queens.
- Neighborhood disparities may be related to demographic differences. The 5 neighborhoods with the lowest screening rates are home to high populations of Asian and foreign-born women, who are less likely to get regular Pap tests.



Risk factors for not receiving routine Pap tests

Women without health insurance and those without a regular health care provider are more likely NOT to get Pap tests

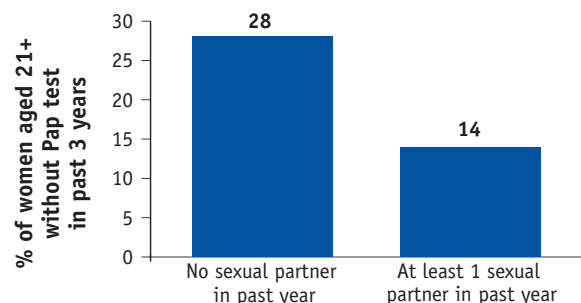
- A woman's access to health care can significantly influence her likelihood of getting screened.
- More than twice as many uninsured women as insured women go without Pap tests (31% vs. 15%).
- Also, 29% of women without a regular health care provider have not had a Pap test in the past 3 years, compared to 18% of women with a regular provider.



Free pelvic exams and Pap tests are available at Health Department STD (sexually transmitted disease) Clinics. For hours and locations, visit nyc.gov/html/doh/html/std/std2.shtml or call 311.

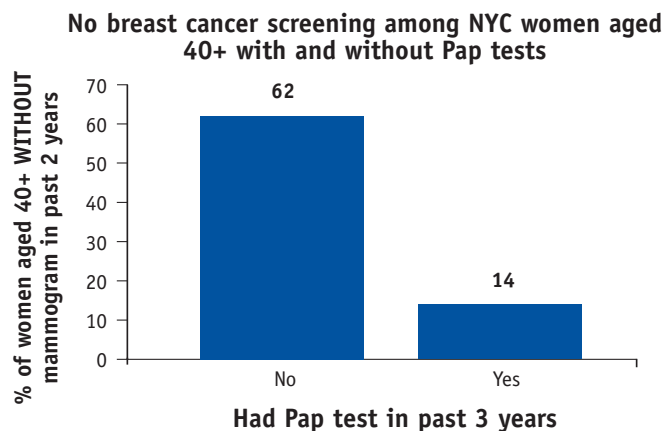
Women without a sexual partner are more likely to go unscreened

- While Pap tests are highly recommended for both younger and older women who are sexually active, all women aged 21 and older should have a Pap test at least every 3 years, regardless of their sexual activity.
- Women who have not had a sexual partner in the past year are twice as likely not to get Pap tests within the recommended timeframe as those with at least one sexual partner (28% vs. 14%).



Women not getting timely Pap tests also are not getting mammograms

- It is recommended that women aged 40 and older have a mammogram to check for breast cancer at least every 2 years. Most women (62%) who don't get regular Pap tests also don't get regular mammograms, compared to only 14% of women who do get regular Pap tests.



Cervical cancer and HPV. The primary known cause of cervical cancer is the human papilloma virus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection. There are more than 100 types of HPV, only a few of which cause cancer in the cervix. The virus often has no symptoms, so people may unknowingly transmit HPV to their sexual partners. Having multiple sexual partners and unprotected sex increases a woman's risk of getting HPV. Condoms can reduce the risk of HPV transmission.

Why no Pap test? What women say . . .

- In 2003, women who had not had a Pap test in the past 3 years were asked why they did not have this test.
- Approximately one third (32%) said they had no particular reason.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) said they did not think they needed the test or a doctor never told them it was necessary.
- Only 8% cited cost as a reason, including not having medical coverage to pay for the test.

Primary reason for NOT getting Pap test	% of women who have NOT had Pap test in last 3 years
No reason / Don't know	32
"I didn't need it" / "I didn't know I needed it"	
"Doctor didn't say I needed it"	18
Put it off / Didn't get around to it	13
I haven't had any problems	9
No insurance / Too expensive / Cost issues	8
Other reason	8
Didn't have a regular doctor	5
Had a hysterectomy	4
Too painful / Unpleasant / Embarrassing	3

As part of the citywide health policy Take Care New York, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is committed to reducing the proportion of women who do not receive Pap tests to 15% by 2008.

Recommendations

Women should know cervical cancer screening guidelines. Pap tests save lives!

- Pap test recommendations:
 - Have an initial Pap test within 3 years of first sexual activity or at age 21 — whichever comes first.
 - Subsequent cervical cancer screening should occur every year, until the woman has 2 to 3 negative Pap tests in a row, at which time Pap tests should continue every 2 to 3 years at least until age 65.
 - Women older than 65 should discontinue Pap testing only after they have had several negative tests and are not otherwise at risk for cervical cancer.
- Women living with HIV/AIDS should have a Pap test every 6 months until they have at least 2 negative Pap tests in a row, at which time Pap tests should continue at least every year.
- A woman who has had a total hysterectomy (in which the cervix was removed) no longer needs Pap tests, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical abnormalities or cancer.

All women should talk to their regular health care provider or gynecologist about Pap tests.

- Women should discuss their medical history and current sexual activity with their health care provider to best determine how often they should be screened.
- Call 311 for help finding a regular doctor or more information on Pap tests (mention cervical cancer).

Health care providers should encourage patients who may be less likely to get Pap tests to have regular screening.

- All primary care providers, not just gynecologists, should check if women need to have a Pap test, and, if so, either perform the test or refer appropriately.
- Targeted outreach toward older, foreign-born, low-income, and uninsured women is recommended.
- All women 21 and older should be screened at least every 3 years, regardless of their current sexual activity.

A report from the New York City Community Health Survey



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