**[Insert region] Residents Who are Overdue for Cervical Screening Encouraged to Be Tested**

*Safe, in-person cancer screening available through health care providers in [Insert Region]*

**Location, Date – On the occasion of** National Cervical Cancer Awareness Week (Oct. 3-8), [REGIONAL CANCER PROGRAM], in partnership with Ontario Health, is encouraging people to stay up to date with regular cervical screening.

Cervical cancer affects hundreds of people each year in Ontario. In 2020, approximately 550 people in Ontario were diagnosed with cervical cancer and about 185 people died from it. However, having regular cervical screening can find abnormal cells that could become cancer (called pre-cancers). Finding pre-cancers and treating them can help prevent cervical cancer.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many non-urgent health care procedures in Ontario, including cancer screening, were paused or deferred to prioritize urgent health care needs and reduce the spread of COVID-19. While screening has resumed, some patients have either been challenged to, or reluctant to, access routine medical care and screening. At any time, routine medical care is an important part of staying healthy and it’s vital that all eligible patients participate in regular cancer screening. Findings from an [Ontario study](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34217413/) indicate that in 2020 there was about a 41 per cent drop in cancer screening tests compared to 2019 pre-pandemic levels. While screening for breast, cervical, colorectal and lung cancer in 2021 remains 11 to 22 per cent below 2019 levels, volumes are beginning to increase as people return to get screened. In June 2021, monthly cervical screening tests were 10 per cent below June 2019 levels.

“It’s more important than ever to get back into the routine of regular cervical screening following the pause in health care that many people experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr. Joan Murphy, Clinical Lead of the Ontario Cervical Screening Program, Ontario Health. “Health care providers and hospitals in Ontario follow strict infection control measures so that patients can visit in person. We strongly encourage people who are due or overdue to schedule their next cervical screening appointment.”

[REGIONAL CANCER PROGRAM], in partnership with Ontario Health, currently recommends cervical screening every three years if you have a cervix, are or have ever been sexually active, and are ages 25 to 70 years. Cervical cancer can almost always be prevented with regular cervical screening, follow-up of abnormal results and vaccination against the human papillomavirus (HPV). Find more information about when to get cervical screening [here](https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/types-of-cancer/cervical/screening).

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**About Cervical Cancer**

Cervical cancer can affect anyone with a cervix who has ever been sexually active. Ontario Health recommends that people should go for cervical screening even if they:

* Feel healthy and have no symptoms;
* Are no longer sexually active;
* Have only had one partner;
* Are in a same-sex relationship;
* Have been through menopause;
* Have no family history of cervical cancer; or
* Have received the HPV vaccine.

Certain types of HPV can cause cervical cancer. HPV is passed from one person to another through sexual contact with a partner of any sex. Sexual contact is when someone has sex with another person or touches another person’s genitals (private parts) with their mouth or hand. HPV infections are common and up to 80 percent of sexually active people will have an HPV infection in their lifetime.

HPV can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. Over many years, these cell changes can sometimes lead to cervical cancer. The good news is these cell changes can be treated before they cause cervical cancer if they are found early. HPV often goes away on its own, but if it does not, cervical screening helps find HPV and any cell changes it might cause.

For more information on cervical screening, visit [Regional website or [www.cancercareontario.ca/ccaw](http://www.cancercareontario.ca/ccaw)]. If you do not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, you can get screened at some public health units, sexual health clinics or walk-in-clinics. The Ministry of Health’s Health Care Connect Program may help you find a doctor or nurse practitioner. Visit [Health Care Connect](https://hcc3.hcc.moh.gov.on.ca/HCCWeb/faces/layoutHCCSplash.jsp) for more information. For Indigenous-led health centres, visit [iphcc.ca/home/iphcc\_members/](file:///C%3A/Users/sara.ogilvie/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/USV0HEVM/iphcc.ca/home/iphcc_members/) and [afhto.ca/find-team-near-you](file:///C%3A/Users/sara.ogilvie/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/USV0HEVM/afhto.ca/find-team-near-you).

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**For more information, please contact:**

**[Insert Regional contact information]**