

NCSP During COVID-19: Laboratory Update, 23 April 2020

Key information in this communication

1. NCSP expectations for cervical screening and colposcopy at the different alert levels
2. A significant change to the follow-up pathway after treatment for a high-grade squamous lesion.
3. Other relevant changes in the revised *Clinical Practice Guidelines for Cervical Screening in New Zealand 2020* due to be published.

1. The NCSP during the COVID-19 pandemic

In Government COVID-19 Alert Level 3 essential preventative health care continues, which includes cervical screening. The National Screening Unit is keen to re-establish cervical screening as soon as is possible, and has provided the following guidelines for primary care:

National Cervical Screening Programme during Alert Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Routine cervical screening will begin to resume for eligible women. For those who are 70 + or with existing medical conditions, the decision to screen will be made on a case-by-case basis - Providers are to continue to invite, see and follow-up all screening participants with previously identified cervical abnormalities on cytology or histology. - In the first instance, priority should be given to annual surveillance rescreens, overdue screens, and priority populations - Where capacity allows providers can invite new eligible women and those due for their 3 yearly repeat screening - Screening support services can assist with engaging priority populations - Continued triage/ assessment of patients with symptoms of abnormal bleeding
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Appendix 1 provides a summary table of expected activity in primary care and colposcopy depending on the various alert levels.

2. Significant change to the follow-up pathway after treatment at colposcopy

There is an important change in the new clinical guidelines (soon to be published) relating to the recommended follow-up pathway for treatment of high-grade squamous disease.

Currently women are seen at 6 months for a colposcopy and cytology test and have a 'test of cure' (cytology and HPV test) in primary care at 12 and 24 months post-treatment. From April 2020 the following changes are being made:

- Many patients treated for high-grade squamous disease will be able to be discharged to primary care for a 'test of cure' at 6 and 18 months after treatment (rather than at 12 and 24 months).
- Women can still be followed up at colposcopy post-treatment if there are any clinical concerns.

This change to follow-up after treatment of high-grade lesions is effective immediately.

The change was planned to be introduced with HPV primary screening but has been fast-tracked due to the evolving COVID-19 situation, to help limit non-essential attendance at clinical appointments. Other countries, including the UK and Ireland have introduced this change to their patient care

pathways. It has been ratified by the Ministry of Health's National Cervical Screening Programme Advisory Group.

Most importantly, there is good evidence that compared to a colposcopy and cervical screening test at 6 months, cervical screening together with an HPV test is much better at identifying the effectiveness of treatment and avoids an unnecessary colposcopy.

The NCSP Register is fully informed of this change and will accept HPV testing carried out as part of a test of cure from 6 months post-treatment.

3. Other important changes in the updated NCSP Guidelines

The Ministry of Health will shortly be publishing the updated *Clinical Practice Guidelines for Cervical Screening in New Zealand 2020*. These changes are likely to affect cytology volumes:

- An increase in the starting age for screening to 25 years.
- People aged 70 years and older who were unscreened or under-screened prior to age 70 will be required to have two consecutive normal cytology samples (taken 12 months apart) before ceasing cytology screening.

Thank you once again for continuing to provide high quality laboratory services during this stressful period of disruption to usual work arrangements.

With thanks

Dr Margaret Sage
Clinical Lead - Pathology
National Cervical Screening Programme

Email - margaret.sage@health.govt.nz
Cellphone - 0226975159

Appendix 1 – NCSP delivery in primary care and DHB colposcopy services according to alert levels

Government COVID-19 Alert level	Primary care/community-based services	DHB colposcopy services
Government Alert Level 4 in the region	<p>GOVERNMENT ALERT LEVEL 4</p> <p>Primary care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine screening is paused. • Anyone who is due for more frequent surveillance screening or follow-up tests such as annual recalls, should continue to be invited, seen and referred as per existing NCSP pathways. • Some providers or patients may not be able or comfortable undertaking cervical screening during this time and under these circumstances, a delay of up to three months is acceptable, with encouragement to attend once the three months has elapsed. • Anyone with cytologic or clinical suspicion of invasive cancer is referred urgently for specialist assessment. 	<p>DHB ALERT LEVEL 4 RED</p> <p>DHB Colposcopy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See proven or suspicious cervical cancer cases only <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>DHB ALERT LEVEL 3 ORANGE</p> <p>DHB Colposcopy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals with suspected or proven cancer should be seen urgently. • High-grade referrals should be triaged and seen as soon as capacity allows. • Other referrals are held. <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>DHB ALERT LEVEL 2 YELLOW</p> <p>DHB Colposcopy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive cancers, high-grade and low-grade referrals are seen, with prioritisation to manage capacity. • Some delay in seeing women with low-grade referrals may still occur (up to 12 months instead of the usual 6 months)
Government Alert Level 3 in the region	<p>GOVERNMENT ALERT LEVEL 3</p> <p>Primary care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As soon as resources allow, routine 3-yearly screening resumes for most women except those over 70 years or with existing medical conditions, where the decision to screen is made on a case-by-case basis. • In the first instance, invitations should prioritise those who are overdue for screening, using a pro-equity approach to prioritising Māori, Pacific, Asian and migrant and refugee women. • Engage screening support services in your district, if available, to assist with engaging priority group women who are hard to reach. • Referrals to colposcopy continue. Anyone with cytologic or clinical suspicion of invasive cancer is referred urgently for specialist assessment. • Regional variation may occur. For example, a region remaining at Level 4 will be unable to resume routine screening. • Women are advised that there could be some delays in being seen at colposcopy, particularly if referred with low-grade changes. 	

Government COVID-19 Alert level	Primary care/community-based services	DHB colposcopy services
Government Alert Level 2	<p>GOVERNMENT ALERT LEVEL 2</p> <p>Primary care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine 3-yearly screening resumes for most women except those over 70 years or with existing medical conditions, where the decision to screen is made on a case-by-case basis. • Invitations for screening should prioritise those who are overdue, using a pro-equity approach to prioritise Māori, Pacific, Asian and migrant and refugee women. • Referral to colposcopy continues as per NCSP protocols. 	<p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>DHB ALERT LEVEL 1 GREEN DHB Colposcopy: Restore normal services as quickly as possible.</p>
Government Alert Level 1	<p>GOVERNMENT ALERT LEVEL 1</p> <p>Primary care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All usual cervical screening programme activities resume. 	