

SECTION 5: TRAINING HEALTH WORKERS IN HPV TESTING

KEY MESSAGES

- Health workers need to be well informed about the natural history of cervical cancer, as well as HPV testing, interpreting HPV test results, follow-up, and counseling for women.
- In-depth training, involving theory and practice, is extremely important for program success. It requires an investment of time and designated funding.
- All health workers involved in cervical cancer screening, particularly in the primary care level, will need training. This includes informing community health workers, general practitioners, gynecologists, pathologists, and laboratory technicians about HPV and HPV testing.
- Health workers who provide screening services to women will need to be trained on how to take HPV test samples and how to communicate results to women.

TRAINING HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Prior to rolling out the HPV test in the cervical cancer screening program, all health workers will require information and training on HPV and cervical cancer. This will involve mainly health professionals working at the primary care level - physicians, nurses, and community health workers – as well as specialists such as gynecologists, pathologists, and laboratory technicians.

Training can include different teaching techniques such as lectures, role playing, practice sample-taking with gynecological models and discussion of different situations or questions that can arise from women participating in HPV testing. It will be important to evaluate participants' knowledge at the end of the training, as well as to routinely supervise and monitor clinical skills, and hold refresher trainings if needed.

Training objectives

The objectives of training health professionals are to ensure that they can provide the following:

- Communicate information about HPV testing and cervical cancer screening to women in plain, clear language.
- Take a cervical sample for HPV testing.
- Provide information and counseling to women, before and after the HPV test is taken.
- Appropriately communicate HPV test results.
- Ensure follow-up care is provided to women, according to the HPV testing guidelines.

Who should be trained?

The following health care workers are suggested to be informed about HPV testing and cervical cancer screening:

- Physicians (general practitioners, gynecologists).
- Nurses (licensed nurses, nurse technicians).
- Community health workers (if applicable).

Training topics

The following topics are suggested to be included in training modules on HPV testing and cervical cancer screening:

Anatomy of the female reproductive system

This information is necessary for health workers to understand and explain to women, in a simple manner, the part of the body from which the tissue sample will be taken to test for the virus.

Natural history of cervical cancer

Health providers need to have a deep understanding of how cervical cancer develops, the role of HPV infection in the development of cervical cancer, how precancerous lesions are detected, and the role of HPV testing to prevent cervical cancer.

Human papillomavirus (HPV)

Health providers will need to know about the different types of HPV, how the virus is transmitted, the health consequences of HPV infection, and general information about the various types of HPV tests.

HPV tests

Health workers need to have a good knowledge on the following information about HPV tests:

- Basic principles of how HPV tests detect the virus.
- Populations that need to be screened: recommended ages for screening and frequency of screening.
- Supplies and materials needed for HPV testing, and how it will be done.
- Who will take the sample for HPV testing, and how the tests will be processed.
- How HPV test results are provided to women.
- What an HPV test result, positive or negative, means.
- How to communicate HPV test results to women.

HPV testing using self-sampling

HPV tests have the advantage that the test sample can be taken by the woman herself, without a gynecological exam (See Section 10: HPV testing using self-sampling). If the HPV test will be used in this manner, health workers should also be trained in the following aspects:

- The technique, procedures and effectiveness of HPV self-sampling.
- How to explain to women, step by step, how to take the sample themselves for HPV testing.
- How the tests will be processed and results provided.

Training in the use of data collection materials

A screening program, regardless of the test used, needs a data collection system and clinical reporting forms, based on the indicators and variables relevant to the program (see Section 11: Information Systems and Program Evaluation). Laboratory forms will also need to be sent with the respective, duly labeled, samples for HPV testing. Health providers will need to be trained in how to use these forms and complete the information, emphasizing the importance of completely filling out the forms to assure patient follow-up and program monitoring.

Training in the use of educational materials and counseling

Educational materials for the public should be part of the HPV test-based screening program (see Section 9: Communicating results about HPV testing). During the training of health providers, these materials should be distributed with explanations about how, and with whom, the educational materials should be used.

Counseling is a fundamental component of a screening program (see Section 9: Communicating results about HPV testing). In this regard, health workers should be trained in the following aspects:

- The concept of pre- and post- HPV test counseling.
- Essential techniques for counseling women on sexual health matters, such as HPV infection and HPV testing.
- The characteristics of a good counselor.
- The key points to convey about HPV infection, HPV testing and cervical cancer prevention.
- How and what to communicate to women about their HPV test result.