

is proud to announce a new initiative

# AIVCC HEALTH TIPS

The tips presented have been researched by our own  
AIVCC doctors and partners.

This series will be focused on  
**cancer screening**



**CANCER  
SCREENING**



# Cervical Cancer



## WHAT

Cancer that develops when cells in the cervix grow in an uncontrolled way and aren't treated. This is usually caused by a virus called HPV (human papillomavirus).

## WHY

Cervical cancer grows slowly. That means screening can find changes early, before they turn into cancer.



## WHO

People with a cervix starting at age 25, or 3 years after becoming sexually active, whichever is later; up to the age of 69.

## HOW

Get screened with a Pap test – a test that checks for unhealthy cells that can lead to cancer.



## HOW OFTEN

Every 3 years, unless otherwise indicated by your doctor.



## HOW TO GET SCREENED

Schedule a Pap test with your family doctor or book an appointment with an AIVCC physician for an in-person Pap referral.



Additional Screening Information

# PAP TESTS

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING A PAP TEST?

- The person getting the test lies down on a table.
- The doctor gently puts a tool called a speculum into the vagina to help see the cervix.
- The doctor uses a small brush or swab to gently collect a few cells from the cervix. It doesn't hurt, but it might feel a little bit weird or uncomfortable.
- The cells are sent to a lab to be checked under a microscope.
- The test usually only takes a few minutes!



## GETTING READY FOR YOUR PAP TEST

**Pick the right day:** Try to book your Pap test when you're not on your period.

**No sex before the test:** Avoid sexual activity for at least 24 hours before your appointment.

**Skip vaginal products:** Don't use sprays, powders, creams, or medicines inside the vagina for at least 24 hours before the test.

**Wait after an infection:** If you're being treated for a vaginal or cervical infection, wait at least 2 weeks after treatment is done before getting a Pap test.

**Go to the bathroom first:** It's a good idea to empty your bladder before the test so you're more comfortable.

A close-up photograph of a woman's right shoulder. She is wearing a white t-shirt. A teal-colored sticker with the letters 'HPV' in white is stuck to her skin. Her hand is resting on her shoulder.

HPV

# Human (HPV) Papillomavirus

## WHAT IS HPV

A very common virus that spreads through close skin-to-skin contact. Most of the time, your body fights it off and clears it on its own. You never even knew you had it! Some types of HPV (commonly HPV 6 and 11) can cause warts on the skin or genitals, while other types (oncogenic strands such as HPV 16 and 18) may not clear on their own. They grow slowly over time in your adulthood (30s-50s) and become precancerous, which can then develop into cancers in your genital area and head and neck. More than 90% of anal and cervical cancers are caused by HPV and 70% of head and neck cancers are caused by HPV.



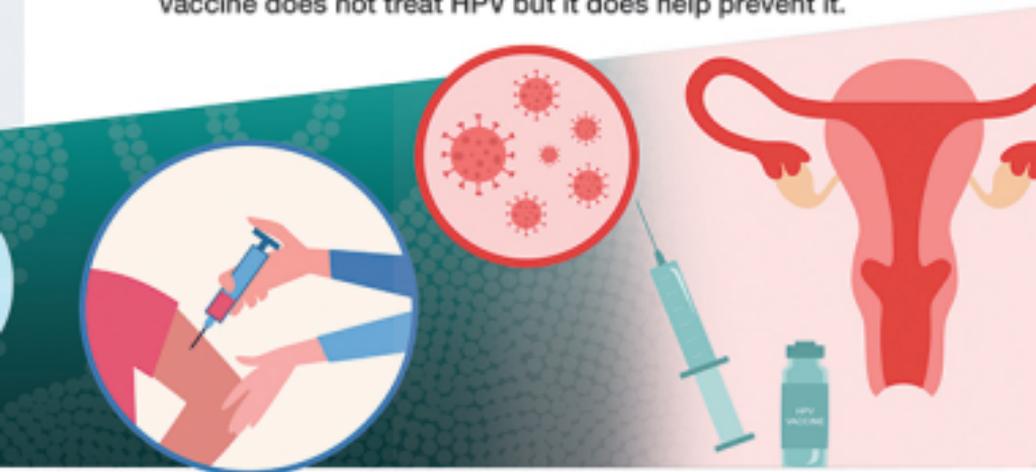
# Human Papillomavirus (HPV-9) Vaccine

## WHAT

A vaccine that helps protect you from 9 types of HPV. These types of HPV can cause genital warts, as well as cervical, anal, penile, vaginal, and head and neck cancers.

## WHY

Without getting immunized, most people who are sexually active will get an HPV infection at some point in their lives. The HPV-9 vaccine does not treat HPV but it does help prevent it.



## WHO

Grade 6 students can get the HPV-9 vaccine at school. If you missed it, you can still get it for free up to and including age 26. In Alberta, people who are a solid organ transplant (SOT) patient or a hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT) patient have coverage up to 45. Otherwise, ask your doctor if you can get the vaccine for free. Even if you can't, it might still be helpful for you.

## HOW MANY DOSES

Most people need 2 doses, 6 months apart. If your immune system is weaker, you may need 3 doses over 6 months.

## WHERE

Contact your local public health or community health centre. You can also speak with your doctor or pharmacist.



# Breast Cancer



## WHAT

A disease where cells in the breast grow abnormally and form a mass or lump called a tumour. Some tumours are cancerous (malignant), some are non-cancerous (benign).

## WHY

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer amongst women. Finding it early makes treatment easier and more effective.

## WHO

People with breasts 45 to 74 years of age. Those with higher risk may start earlier.

## HOW

Mammogram - a special X-ray that takes pictures of the breast. An ultrasound may also be included, depending on health history and breast density.

## HOW OFTEN

Every 1 to 2 years, depending on age and health history.

## HOW TO GET SCREENED

See your family doctor or an AIVCC physician for a requisition. You may also be able to self-refer, meaning you can schedule a mammogram without a requisition.

## MOBILE MAMMOGRAM

Visit <https://screeningforlife.ca/breast/screen-test-mobile-clinics> to see when a mobile screening clinic may be in your area.





Additional Screening Information

# MAMMOGRAM

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING A MAMMOGRAM?

- You stand in front of a special x-ray machine.
- A technician helps place one breast at a time on a flat surface.
- Another flat plate gently presses down on the breast to spread the tissue, so the picture is clear.
- The machine takes a quick picture.
- This is done for each breast, with photos being taken from different angles.
- The whole test usually takes about 15–20 minutes.

## GETTING READY FOR YOUR MAMMOGRAM

**What to Wear:** Wear a shirt and bra that are easy to take off, because you'll need to undress from the waist up. Take off any necklaces or jewelry so they don't get in the way.

**What Not to Use:** On the day of your test, don't use deodorant, lotion, powder, perfume, or cream under your arms or on your breasts. These things can affect the quality of the x-ray.

### Worried About Discomfort?

Avoid booking your mammogram during the week before your period, if your breasts are usually tender then talk to your doctor about taking a mild pain reliever about an hour before your appointment.

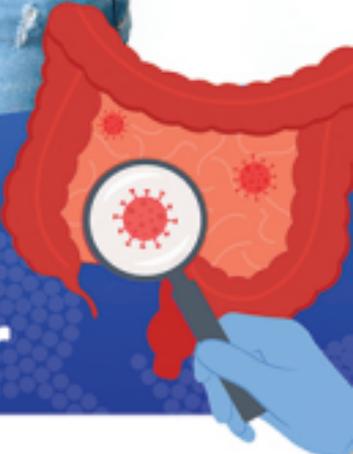
Depending on health history and the density of your breasts, it may also be recommended you get a breast ultrasound (in addition to your mammogram).

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING A BREAST ULTRASOUND?

- You will lie down on a table.
- A technician will put a special gel on your breast. The gel helps the sound waves travel better.
- The technician will move a small device called a transducer over your breast. It sends high frequency sound waves inside your breast and takes pictures.
- You might feel a little pressure, but it doesn't hurt.
- The test usually takes about 15 to 30 minutes.



# Colorectal Cancer



## WHAT

Cancer that starts in the colon (large intestine) or the rectum. Sometimes small growths called polyps can form inside. Most are harmless, but some can slowly turn into cancer.

## WHY

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Alberta. It often grows slowly, and early detection makes it much easier to treat or even prevent.

## WHO

People 50 to 74 years of age. If you have a first degree relative (parent, sibling, or child) that has a history of colorectal cancer or advanced (high risk) adenomas, you may be recommended to start screening at 40 (or 10 years younger than age of relative at time of diagnosis).



## HOW

A simple at-home FIT test (Fecal Immunochemical Test) that checks stool for hidden blood. If blood is found, the next step in screening is a colonoscopy.



## HOW OFTEN

Once every year.



## HOW TO GET A FIT KIT

Book an appointment with an AIVCC physician to get a form that allows you pick up a kit at a lab nearest you.



OR

Order a FIT kit directly to your home at <https://screeningforlife.ca/colorectal>.





Additional Screening Information

# FIT TEST

## HOW DO I DO A FIT TEST?

- The FIT kit comes with instructions and pictures to show you what to do. It's a simple test—you just need to collect a small sample of your poop using a plastic stick, then place the stick into the bottle that comes in the kit.
- Bring your completed test and your lab form to the lab within 7 days

## GETTING READY FOR YOUR FIT TEST

- If you are bleeding from diagnosed hemorrhoids or if you're on your period, wait until the bleeding has stopped before doing your FIT test.
- You don't need to change what you eat or the medicines you take. Just keep eating your regular meals and take your usual medications before doing the test



## How to Get Screened Through AIVCC

At the Alberta Indigenous Virtual Care Clinic, we are committed to helping our patients get up to date, and stay up to date, with routine cancer screenings. Your health matters - let's protect it together.

If you have an upcoming medical appointment with an AIVCC physician and are due for screening, one of our Registered Nurses will contact you by phone in advance. If we're unable to reach you beforehand, your physician will discuss the screening with you during your appointment.

If you don't have an upcoming appointment but think you might be due for screening, give us a call at AIVCC — we'll be happy to help you book a visit with one of our doctors to get a referral or requisition.

Please visit our website  
for more resources:  
<https://aivcc.ca/resources/>



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