

National performance assessment of cervical screening programme

2020



A high proportion of women are summoned for cervical screening and a significant portion participates, although there are large differences between regions. These results are shown in the National Board of Health and Welfare's first national performance assessment of the cervical screening programme, which is based on the National Board of Health and Welfare's recommendations and the national care programme for cervical cancer prevention.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a life threatening disease that is largely preventable with screening. Screening for cervical cancer was introduced in Sweden in the 60's and have been successful. The purpose is to find and treat cervical cancer in its preliminary stages to lessen the onset. Screening can also detect the disease in its early stages.

There are multiple causes for cervical cancer, although the most important factor is a human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. Since 2015, the National Board of Health and Welfare has recommended that the healthcare sector should offer cervical screening in the form of Pap smears that are analysed for HPV.

Implementation of cervical screening programme

The regions have spent much time and effort to implement HPV screening in accordance with the National Board of Health and Welfare's recommendations. The most difficult issue most regions report is their summon systems. For a successful screening programme it is necessary that the targeted population is being summoned and participates in the programme. The implementation has been unequal throughout the country, but during 2020 the last of the regions plan to implement the National Board of Health and Welfare's recommended HPV screening for women from the age of 30 until the screening programme ends.

Increasing participation in cervical screening programme

Non-adherence to cervical screening is the foremost risk factor for developing cervical cancer. Barely 60 percent of women participate within 3 months after being summoned and almost 70 percent within 12 months. Therefore it is important that the regions facilitate and encourage women to participate in the screening programme. Women with a lower level of education tend to participate to a lesser extent than others. Regions also need to expand the screening programme to include more women above the age of 50 years.

Follow up on women with abnormal screening results

All women with abnormal screening results need a follow-up appointment. It is important that women with abnormal HPV but with subsequent normal cytology are followed up with a new Pap smear as these women are a risk group. It is therefore important for the regions to invest in this to an even greater extent.

Cervical cancer is increasing among women with normal Pap smear results (interval cancer)

Interval cancer refers to cancer that develops within a screening interval. The results show an increase in interval cancer despite normal Pap smear results, which is concerning.

Invest in staff training

The staff concerned need a good knowledge of cervical screening in order to provide women with information and to meet different needs. However, the results show a wide difference in the extent to which different professions are offered training, as

well as differences between regions. It is important to continuously train personnel working with cervical screening.

More areas are in need of improvement

- Summons and updated systems need to be coordinated across regional borders so that the women who are part of the screening programme receive the summons at the appropriate time, regardless of where in Sweden they live.
- Develop cooperation between the settings involved in the healthcare chain by providing conditions for multidisciplinary conferences.
- Oversee regional level structuring to improve the diagnosis and care of women who show signs of deviations in their glandular cells, as such changes are a major reason for women developing cervical cancer.
- Increased access to gynaecologists trained in colposcopy skills.
- Quality assure the cytological analysis method as the results indicate large differences in cytological diagnostics after testing positive for HPV, which has created a need for a colposcopy investigation.

What are national screening programmes?

The assignment of the National Board of Health and Welfare is to develop recommendations for the national screening programmes. The purpose of the recommendations is to reach a national cooperation for the screening programmes and to create conditions for equal care.

More information about the performance assessment, indicators and the national screening programme is available (in Swedish) on the National Board of Health and Welfare's website, www.socialstyrelsen.se.