

Community Health Corner: Well Women

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FACT SHEET #4

2024 Annual Lesson Series



A Well-Woman's Pelvic Exam Should Not be Avoided

Regular health screenings are important to a woman's health. Screenings and well-women health checkups catch diseases and conditions early so they can be treated. For example, a woman's pelvic exam that includes a cervical cancer screening is an important yet missed check-up that women may be hesitant to discuss. However, the pelvic exam and pap smear for cancer are recommended every three years for women ages 21 to 29 and every five years for women ages 30 to 65. The nation's Healthy People 2030 goal is to have 84.3% of women screened on time for cervical cancer, and Kansas is close to that goal at 83%. However, a well-women's pelvic exam is more than collecting a pap smear to test for cervical cancer or infections. A pelvic exam is part of a thorough gynecological exam that includes the internal collection of cells from the cervix, external exams of the genitals, and the use of a speculum to check for unusual growths and conditions. The Mayo Clinic has a clear and helpful description of the pelvic exam on their website: www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/pelvic-exam/about/pac-20385135.

Doctors and licensed health care providers who perform the exam recommend that women relax, breathe deeply and rest during the exam. Be assured that if a woman requests to be accompanied by a friend, parent, family member, or an ally during the exam, they will be asked to stand at a location in the exam room that preserves personal privacy. Schedule an annual pelvic exam and ask your doctor whether you are due for a Pap smear. If you do not have a physician, you can reach out to your local health department or community health worker to determine where a pap smear can be scheduled.



Vaccination

Credible information about vaccination: We can do this!

Vaccinations are one of the most effective measures against infectious diseases that families, neighbors, and communities have. However, the pandemic has revealed that people seek and share information from many sources, some of which aren't reputable or accurate. Intentional misinformation about vaccinations and vaccines (the serums used in injections) can lead to confusion and conflict. The U.S. Surgeon General, who is a chief health strategist for the nation, has recommendations to avoid being swayed by misinformation and to reduce conflict with others who might be invested in questionable information:

- Health websites sponsored by governmental or educational institutions (.gov or .edu) are good sources of information.
- Don't make decisions based on out-of-date information — check questionable information with your health care provider.

- When you know someone is sharing misinformation and you care about them, take these steps: listen to their fears and why they believe what they do; ask open questions to understand where they are coming from; suggest credible sources and agree that finding accurate information can be hard when discoveries result in new information; and don't shame – we can all learn more about how health information can influence thinking.

For more information visit Surgeon General Murthy's Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation at: <https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/outreach-tools/addressing-covid-19-vaccine-misconceptions>.

Find a vaccine near you:

Search vaccines.gov

Text your ZIP code to 438829

Call 1-800-232-0233



Don't Ignore What Your Body is Saying To You

If you run out of time during an appointment

The average length of a doctor's appointment is usually between 10 and 15 minutes, so you'll want to get the most out of your time during the appointment. Plan in advance, have written notes to share, and be ready to describe your body's symptoms clearly and directly.

- Take written notes during the appointment. Your doctor is a good source of accurate information so capture it when you can.
- You can ask your doctor to write down notes and instructions for you. These should be provided to you at the end of your appointment.
- Record instructions on your phone. Ask your doctor if it's okay for you to record their instructions so you remember them correctly.

- Gather brochures or other educational materials. If there aren't any available, ask where or how you can get some.
- Bring a friend or family member with you to the appointment. They can help write down the answers to your questions and other information provided by the doctor or nurse. If necessary, they can provide you with support for complex conditions.

Still, you may need more time to talk with your doctor, so ask for it. If the doctor isn't available to help, you should be able to talk to an assistant or nurse. If no one else is available, see if you can schedule another appointment to ask the rest of your questions. Make a plan to get all of your questions answered.



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