Conventional Gynecologic Cytology  
(Pap smears)

Although liquid-based cytology is the preferred tool for cervical cancer screening, conventional smear cytology remains an acceptable alternative. The instruments available for sampling include wooden or plastic spatulas, cytobrush devices, and broom devices. Cotton swabs are not recommended.

1. Label the frosted end of the slide with the patient's name using a pencil.

2. Use speculum lubricated with warm water (not lubricant).

3. Cervix and adjacent endocervix should be well-visualized.

4. Sample ectocervix and endocervix separately, unless a broom device is being used.
   - Ectocervix: Rotate spatula with firm pressure over entire ectocervix (360°).
   - Endocervix: Rotate brush 90° to 180°, but no more.
   - Broom: Rotate clockwise 3 to 5 full circles.

If the patient has had a total hysterectomy, obtain a vaginal sample using the preferred sample device (spatula is recommended).

Note: The brush device is not recommended after the first 10 weeks of pregnancy.

5. Transfer the cellular material to the labeled glass slide by applying the sampling device to the end closest to the frosted end, and spread in a uniform motion. If vaginal, cervical and endocervical samples are taken separately (VCE technique), place the vaginal sample closest to the frosted end, with the cervical portion adjacent to it, followed by the endocervical sample.

6. Fix slide immediately with cytology spray fixative.

Unacceptable Specimens

Slides that are received broken into more than one piece will not be processed. Unlabeled slides, slides labeled in ink, and slides that do not match requisitions or are without complete requisitions will not be processed, and will be returned to the clinician's office for correction.

Limitations

Lubricant can obscure epithelial cells. Cotton swabs may absorb diagnostic cells, making transfer of material to the glass slide suboptimal. Broken slides that are
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processed in the lab may have portions of the slide that cannot be visualized for diagnosis.

References


Cancer Care Ontario: Ontario Cervical Screening Guidelines:
