CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES • OFFICE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH

CWHS

# Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

## WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF PAP SMEAR TESTING, CALIFORNIA, 2000

Office of Women's Health, California Department of Health Services

***Public Health Message:***

*The majority of California women surveyed were unsure of the purpose of the Pap test. Many women thought the Pap test detects ovarian cancer, which may lead to a false sense of security among these women.*

The California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) 2000 showed that 85% of California women had a Pap test within the past three years, however, a majority of these women were unclear about what the Pap test actually detects. The CWHS provided an opportunity to ask women about their knowledge of the Pap test.

Women were asked: ***"Which of the following can be detected with a Pap smear? Would you say ovarian cancer, cervical cancer, both or neither?"***

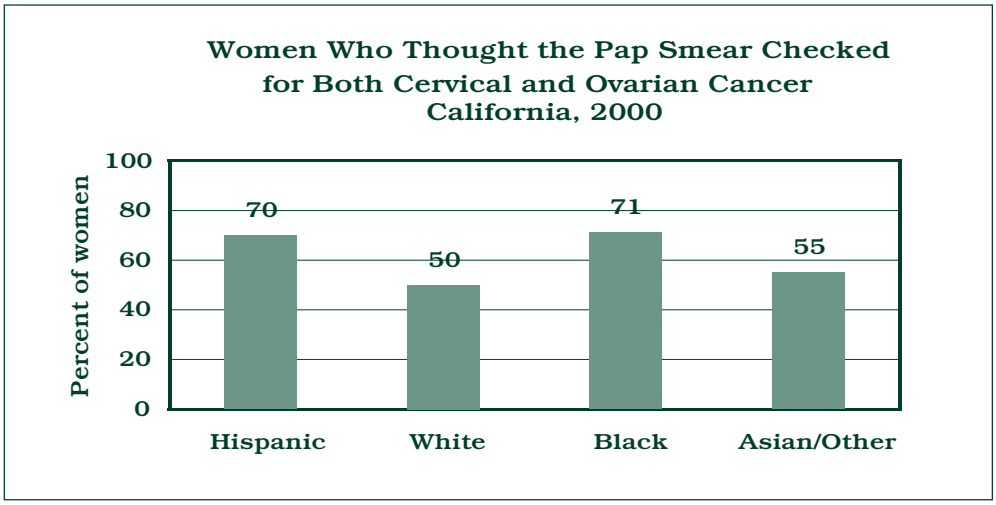
- Over half (56%) of the women said they thought the Pap test checked for both ovarian and cervical cancer, 37% thought it checked for cervical only, 4% for neither and 3% for ovarian cancer only.
- Hispanic (70%) and Black (71%) women were more likely than White (50%) and Asian/other (55%) women to think that the Pap test detected both ovarian and cervical cancer.
- Women ages 34 and younger (65%) were more likely than women over age 34 (50%) to think the Pap test checked for both ovarian and cervical cancer.

Although the Pap test is effective in early detection of cervical cancer, it cannot detect ovarian cancer. While an annual pelvic examination can find some reproductive system cancers at an early stage, most early ovarian tumors are difficult to detect.[1] Only 25% of ovarian cancers are found at an early stage. Early detection improves the chances of successful treatment. Most ovarian cancers occur in women over the age of 50.[2] Certain symptoms may indicate a problem with the ovaries and the need for an examination by a healthcare provider. These include swelling of the abdomen, vaginal bleeding, pelvic pressure, back pain, leg pain, and digestive problems such as gas, bloating, indigestion, or long-term stomach pain.[3]

[1] American Cancer Society, Cancer Resource Center, "Ovarian Cancer, What Is It?"

[2] National Cancer Institute, NIH Publication No 00-561, 2000

[3] American Cancer Society, Cancer Resource Center, "Ovarian Cancer, Can Ovarian Cancer Be Found Early?"

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