



# Cervical Cap/Fem Cap/Lea's Shield

## PATIENT EDUCATION SERIES

### What is it?

The cervical cap, Fem Cap, and Lea's Shield are barrier methods that are placed over the cervix. They require fitting by pelvic exam and have effectiveness rates of 68-84% with typical use. They must be used with spermicidal cream or jelly and placed before intercourse and left in place up to 48 hours after intercourse.

### How does it work?

All cervical caps are inserted into the vagina, fit over the cervix and are held in place by suction. The cap acts as a barrier, similar to the diaphragm, to prevent sperm from entering the uterus and fertilizing an egg. The cervical cap must be used with spermicidal cream or jelly which helps inactivate sperm and helps to make a stronger suction seal between the cap and the cervix.

### How do you get a cervical cap?

Because women have different sized cervixes, these need to be fitted individually to each woman by a medical provider. The fit should be checked during a pelvic exam each year and/or after every pregnancy/abortion. Because the caps only come in limited sizes, these sizes may not fit all women. There are some subtle differences amongst these 3 caps, for example the cervical cap cannot be used during menses, while the Fem Cap and Lea's Shield can. If you are interested in being fitted for a cap, a medical provider at Health Services can discuss this with you and give you a referral.

### What are some advantages?

- They are barrier methods.
- Use of caps may help make sex more spontaneous because it can be left in for up to 2 days.
- They are inexpensive and reusable.
- Using a cap increases familiarity with one's vagina and cervix.

### What are some disadvantages?

- Availability of caps is limited at this time because it is only prescribed by a specially-trained professional.
- Some women notice that the cap develops an unpleasant odor. If this occurs, you should discuss it with your medical provider.

- The cap can cause cervical changes, such as cervicitis.
- Occasionally, the cap may come off during intercourse or a bowel movement.
- The cap should not be used by women who have a history of pelvic inflammatory disease or abnormal pap smears.

### What are the possible side effects?

- Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a very rare but serious disorder. Signs of TSS are fever of 102 or higher, headache, muscle aches, vomiting, low grade dizziness, low blood pressure, rash (looks like sunburn at first then becomes more dot-like) during or just after the menstrual period. Risk of TSS may be decreased by avoiding use of the caps during menstruation.
- Possible allergic reaction to the spermicide or to the rubber may occur.
- Continued contact of the cervix with the rubber and spermicide may cause the cervix to become irritated. Women with cervical erosion, laceration or an abnormal pap smear should not use a cap until these conditions are resolved.
- Another concern arises because cervical secretions build up in the cap instead of bathing the vaginal wall, possibly predisposing a woman to infection.

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