

What does it mean when abnormal cells are found on my Pap test?

Your medical provider may do one or more of the following:

- Use a special device called a colposcope that magnifies the cervix, so that abnormal areas on the cervix can be seen.
- Give you medicine to treat an infection if one is present and then have you return for another Pap test.
- Remove the abnormal cells and have you return for Pap tests at regular intervals.
- Take a small piece of tissue (biopsy) from the cervix and send it to the lab for evaluation.



Are some women more likely to get cancer than others?

YES – the following factors place a woman at a higher risk for developing cervical cancer.

Those who had

- first sexual contact before age 18.
- a pregnancy before age 18.
- many sexual partners.
- frequent sexually transmitted infections.
- an HPV infection.
- a weakened immune system, such as AIDS/HIV, chronic immunodeficiency disease, diabetes.

How accurate is the Pap test?

No Pap test is 100% accurate.

All laboratories are strictly regulated to adhere to quality assurance guidelines; however, looking for abnormal cells among hundreds of thousands of cells on a slide is very labor-intensive, and errors can be made.

Since cervical cancer grows very slowly from milder abnormalities to cancer, it is essential to have regular Pap tests (as your medical provider recommends), so that if abnormal cells are missed, they will be discovered on the next Pap test.



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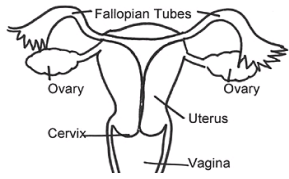
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THE PAP TEST



WHO NEEDS IT?

What is a Pap test?



A Pap test is a simple procedure that your medical provider does during a pelvic examination. A very tiny brush is used to gently collect cells from the cervix (the opening of the uterus).

Introduced more than 60 years ago, Pap tests have dramatically reduced the incidence of cervical cancer in the U.S.

Why should I have a Pap test?

A Pap test is a safe, effective method of finding abnormal cells from the cervix. A Pap test will find cancer cells and pre-cancerous cell changes, which can be identified and treated at an early stage before they become cancer.

Over 70% of women who die from cervical cancer have NEVER had a Pap test or have not had Pap tests regularly. Their cancers were not found when they were still curable.

When do I need a Pap test?

Experts recommend that women begin getting annual Pap tests at age 21. The appropriate frequency of testing will be determined by your caregiver.

Women age 70 and older or those who have had a hysterectomy should consult with their medical providers whether and when they should have Pap tests.

How do I prepare for a Pap test?

To ensure the most accurate test results from your Pap test, prepare as follows.

Do not

- schedule your Pap test to be done during or immediately after your period.
- use creams, foams, lubricants, or douches for two days before your Pap test.
- have sexual intercourse for two days before your Pap test.

What will my doctor need to know before the examination?

It is very important to tell your medical provider the following information:

- Age, date of last menstrual period and any hormone pills or creams you are using
- Any abnormal vaginal bleeding
- Any vaginal discharge
- Any abnormal Pap tests or biopsies in the past

What happens to my Pap test after it is collected?

Pap tests are collected, preserved, and sent to a medical laboratory where the tests are processed. The cells are placed on a slide where they are colored with special dyes so the cell features can be seen. A cytotechnologist (one who is specially trained to read and interpret cells on slides) evaluates the cells using a microscope.

Some slides, however, may be pre-screened by computers before being reviewed by the cytotechnologist.

Abnormal findings are reviewed by a pathologist (one who is specially trained to study diseases), who makes the final interpretation.



How might Pap test results be interpreted?

Normal

More than 90% of Pap tests are normal.

Mild cell changes

Mild cell changes can result from infections and usually disappear when the infection is treated. Yeast, bacteria, and trichomonas organisms can be seen under a microscope. These infections may cause pain, itching, or discharge.

Distinctive cell changes are caused by the herpes virus and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

HPV is a very common virus that is passed from person-to-person through skin-to-skin contact in the genital area. Many types of HPV viruses exist. Your body's immune system will eliminate most of them without lasting effect.

There are also a few types of "high-risk" HPV that can lead to cervical cancer if untreated. There is a test that can identify the presence of HPV in the abnormal cells.

Depending on your situation, an HPV test may help to determine the best next step for your medical provider.

Cancer

Cancer can be treated by removing the uterus (womb) or with radiation or other types of therapy. Treatment, curability, and survival are dependent on the type of cancer, how far it has grown, and the general health of the patient. Prompt EARLY treatment is usually very successful. The sooner the cancer is found the better the chance of stopping its growth and improving survival.