



A Pap test, sometimes called a Pap smear, looks for abnormal cells that can turn into cervical cancer. It also looks for infections or inflammation of the cervix.

What is a Pap Test?

A Pap test is part of a pelvic exam. Your health care provider will use an instrument to remove a few cells from your cervix. The cervix forms the neck of the uterus and opens into the vagina. The cervix cells will be sent to a lab where they will be examined.

It usually takes a few days or a week to get the results. If your test results are not normal your health care provider will let you know.

Who Should Get a Pap Test?

All women should begin getting Pap tests after they turn 21 years of age. Pap tests should be done at least every three years. Ask your health care provider how often you need a Pap test.

If you are over the age of 65 or have had a hysterectomy you can talk with health care provider about whether you need to continue getting Pap tests.

Preparing for a Pap Test

Schedule your appointment for a day when you will not be having your period. The best time of the month is 10 to 20 days after the last day of your period.

Before a Pap test do not have sex, douche, use tampons, vaginal creams, spermicides or vaginal deodorant for 48 hours.

Abnormal vs. Normal Pap Tests

A normal test result means the cells in your cervix look normal. An abnormal Pap test result can happen for many reasons. This could be caused by irritation, inflammation, infection, menopausal changes, or cancer. Your health care provider may repeat the Pap test or do other tests to find out why the cells did not appear normal.

Other Tests:

If you have an abnormal Pap test, these are some other tests your health provider may do to see if there is a problem.

Colposcopy

The walls of your vagina and your cervix are examined through an instrument called a colposcope which magnifies the cells.

LUMA Cervical Imaging System

This tool uses a light to make a map of your cervix by seeing how different areas of the cervix respond to the light.

Endocervical Curettage

A sample of cells is taken from the endocervical canal with a spoon shaped tool called a curette.

Biopsy

A small sample of cervical tissue is removed for examination and sent to a lab to be studied under a microscope.

Reducing Your Risk for Cervical Cancer:

HPV (human papillomavirus) is the main cause of cervical cancer. Most women do not know if they have HPV because it has no symptoms. Having HPV does not mean you will develop cancer. There are forty different strands of HPV and not all of them cause cancer.

HPV is usually passed along during sexual contact. You can reduce your risk of being infected by:

- Not having multiple sex partners or partners who have multiple sex partners
- Using a condom
- Receiving the HPV vaccine (this does not protect against all strands)
- Abstaining from sex

*Having Pap tests frequently can detect cervical cancer early and increase the chance of successful treatment if you do get cervical cancer. Ask your health care provider how often you should have a Pap test.

For more information, contact the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 or www.cancer.org.