

FACTS ABOUT PAP SMEARS

"PAP TEST"

What is a Pap Smear?

A Pap Smear/Test is a test (cervical cancer screening) to find any changes in the cells of the cervix that could lead to cancer. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus (womb). During the pap test, the healthcare provider inserts a speculum into the vagina and collects cells from the cervix with a brush or tiny spatula. The cells are put into a liquid and sent to a lab for testing. Screening sometimes includes testing for human papillomavirus (HPV). (Certain types of HPV are associated with cancer of the cervix). If both tests are done at the same time, this is called "co-testing".

Why is a Pap Smear so important?

- Women who have cancer of the cervix may not have any symptoms.
- Regular Pap smears can detect cancer of the cervix and any cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer.
- Pap smears can also detect other conditions such as infections or inflammation.

When should have Pap Smears and how often?

- Testing (cervical cancer screening) should start at age 21 years.
- Women ages 21-29 years should have a Pap test every 3 years.
- Women ages 30-65 years should have a Pap test and an HPV test (called co-testing) every 5 years. It is ok to have only a Pap test without the HPV test every 3 years.
- If you have had a total hysterectomy (uterus and cervix removed) or partial hysterectomy (uterus removed and cervix was left), you may still need to have a Pap test. Talk with your healthcare provider.

When can I stop having Pap Smears?

- Women should stop having testing (cervical cancer screening) after age 65 as long as they do not have a history of changes in cells and have had three negative Pap test results in a row or two negative co-test results in a row within the past 10 years, with the most recent test performed within the past 5 years.

Women who have a history of cervical cancer, are infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), have a weakened immune system, or who were exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth may need more frequent testing or to continue testing after age 65.

When is the best time for a Pap Smear?

- At least 5 days after your period is over.
- After any infection in the vagina has been treated and cleared.

Facts about PAP Smears "Pap Test" (continued on the back)

How do I get ready for a Pap Smear?

48 hours (2 days) before the test **DO NOT:**

- Have sex (penis in the vagina)
- Use tampons
- Douche
- Use vaginal lubrication
- Insert creams, suppositories, or medication into the vagina
- Use vaginal sprays or powders

How will I know what my Pap Smear result is?

The lab sends the results to your healthcare provider. Your provider will contact you if the Pap Smear result is not normal (abnormal). You may contact your healthcare provider if you have questions about your Pap.

If you have an abnormal result, you may need further testing. The additional testing will be done based on your age and your initial Pap test result.

What does my Pap Smear result mean?

- **NORMAL.** This is good. The cervical cells are healthy.
- **UNSATISFACTORY for EVALUATION.** The slide cannot be read. Causes include douching, bleeding, infection, or not enough cells on the slide. The Pap smear should be repeated.
- **BENIGN.** The Pap smear showed infection, irritation or normal cell repair. If you have an infection, you may need medication. Otherwise, your healthcare provider will most likely recommend another Pap smear.
- **ASCUS.** (Atypical cells of undetermined significance) — The Pap smear showed some abnormal changes in the cells, but the cause is not clear. Infection is a common cause, and you may be given medication. Your health care provider will recommend specific follow-up. This may include another Pap smear or a colposcopy. A colposcopy is looking at the cervix through a high power microscope.
- **LOW GRADE CHANGES.** This may indicate you have been infected with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Some types of HPV are associated with an increased risk for cancer of the cervix. Your healthcare provider will recommend specific follow-up. This may include another Pap smear or a colposcopy.
- **HIGH GRADE CHANGES.** The cells of the cervix may progress toward cancer, but they are not cancer yet. Less than half of women with this test result will develop cancer. Colposcopy is needed. Biopsy and treatment may be necessary. Treatment is very important.

How can I reduce my risk of cancer of the cervix?

- Get a Pap Smear as recommended by your healthcare provider
- Do Not Smoke - it increases your chance of getting cancer of the cervix
- Consider Decisions About Sex Very Carefully - your risk increases the younger you start having sex
- Being Abstinent - not having sex
- If you do have sex - limit your sex partners
- Do not have sex with someone who has a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Protect yourself; always use a latex or vinyl condom every time you have oral, vaginal or anal sex