

Steps to help prevent cervical cancer

- Have a Pap test on a regular schedule.
- Get the results of your Pap test.
- See your doctor if you need any follow-up treatment.
- Always report any symptoms to your doctor.

Questions about Pap Tests and Cervical Cancer



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Having a Pap test is one of the most important steps that you as a woman can take to protect yourself from cervical cancer.

- The cervix is the lower opening of your uterus.
- The Pap test looks for changes in the cervix that might lead to cancer.
- Changes in the cervix are often caused by a common virus called the human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Changes in the cervix caused by HPV can lead to cervical cancer.
- If cancer occurs, the Pap test can find it early, when it is easier to treat.
- Your doctor can tell you how often you should have a Pap test.

Can cervical cancer be prevented?

Yes. Getting a regular Pap test with proper follow-up with your doctor will prevent most cases of cervical cancer. Pap tests can find cervix cell changes early, before they become cervical cancer. These cervix cell changes can then be treated to prevent them from becoming cancer. The Pap test will also find most cervical cancers at an early, curable stage. Most cervical cancers, though, are found in women who do not have regular tests, or who haven't had one in 5 years.

If all women had regular Pap tests, most cervical cancers could be prevented.

What is a Pap test?

With a Pap test, cells from a woman's cervix are removed with a swab or soft brush during a pelvic exam. These cells are looked at under a microscope. The Pap test helps doctors find early changes in the cells in the cervix that might lead to cancer.

What other test might be done?

In India, some doctors and medical centers might offer women a visual inspection test, called a VIA. This test is also done during a pelvic exam. A solution is applied to the cervix with a cotton swab. The cervix is examined after about 2 minutes under a bright light to see if there are any changes in the cervix. These changes are abnormal cervix cell changes. Another visual inspection test that might be done is the VILI. It uses a different solution on the cervix and requires special equipment.

What can I do to get ready for my Pap test?

- Try not to have your test during your menses.
- It is best if you do not have sexual relations for 48 hours before the test.
- It is best if you do not put anything into the vagina, like creams, foams, or tampons, for 48 hours before the test.

If I am not having sexual relations, do I still need to get a Pap test?

Yes. Women who were sexually active in the past can still get cervical cancer.

How often should I be tested for cervical cancer?

- You should begin having Pap tests by age 30. Testing should be done every 3 years.
- If you are 50 years of age or older, you can be tested every 5 years.
- If you are 65 years of age and have had 2 negative Pap tests in a row, you do not need to be tested any more unless you have symptoms.
- If you have had a hysterectomy with removal of the uterus and cervix, you may stop testing, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer. If you still have your cervix, you should still be tested.

What if my Pap test is negative?

If your test is negative, it means that you do not have any cell changes that might develop into cancer. You still need to be tested at regular intervals to make sure that such changes do not develop.

What if my test is positive?

If your test is positive, you must talk with your doctor. You will need other tests to find out if you have a pre-cancer or a cancer. If you have a pre-cancer, the doctor may decide to see if the condition goes away on its own or he may treat you. If you have cancer, you will need to be treated right away.

What do I need to know about HPV?

HPV is a virus that is very common among people who have sexual relations. It is passed from person to person by close sexual contact. Most people never know they have the virus and it usually goes away on its own. In some women, it can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. These changes can be found with a Pap test or other cervical cancer test. So, if a woman has HPV and it has caused cervix cell changes, these changes can be found with a cervical cancer test and then be treated.

What are the signs and symptoms of cervical cancer?

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding
- An unusual discharge from the vagina
- Pain during sexual relations

These signs and symptoms can also be caused by conditions other than cervical cancer. If you have any of these problems, see your doctor right away – even if you have been getting Pap tests. Women who have early cervical cancers usually have no symptoms.