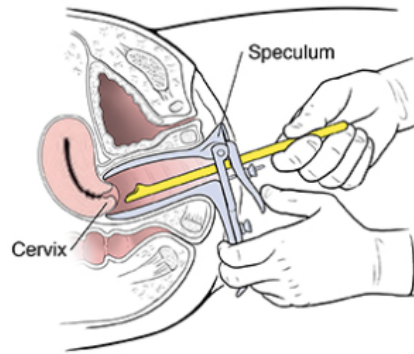


Cervical Cancer Screening (Pap Smears)

Screening tests look for cancer cells in the cervix. The cervix is the bottom part of the uterus, where it meets the vagina.



Screening tests also look for cells that could turn into cancer, called "precancer." They can find cervical cancer and precancer in the early stages, when it can be treated or even cured.

What tests are used to screen for cervical cancer?

- Pap Test – the most common screening test. Your doctor will take cells from the surface of the cervix and send them to a lab. The lab will then look at those cells under a microscope to see if they are abnormal.
- HPV test – HPV is short for "human papillomavirus." HPV is the virus that causes cervical cancer. This test examines cervical cells for different types of HPV.
- Combination test – Pap and HPV test at the same time

What to expect

You will lie on an exam table, feet in foot rests. Your doctor will then place a speculum to gently open the vagina. Cells are taken from the cervix with a small spatula or rubber broom. A small brush will then be used to remove cells from inside the cervical canal. You may feel pressure or slight discomfort.

What should I do to prepare?

Nothing! You do not have to avoid sexual intercourse prior to pap smears. Your doctor may recommend scheduling your test when you do not expect your period. But do not worry if you have your period the day of the test. Screening can still be performed.

When should I start being screened for cervical cancer?

Age 21 – you do not need cervical cancer screening before this, even if you became sexually active at a younger age. If you have HIV, your doctor may recommend earlier screening.

How often should I have cervical cancer screening?

If your prior pap smears have been normal:

- Age **21 to 29** - Pap smear every 3 years
- Age **30 to 65** - Pap smear every 3 years OR Pap + HPV every 5 years
- Age **65 or older** – STOP screening if:
 - o For the past 10 years you have had
 - 3 normal pap tests in a row
 - 2 normal pap + HPV tests in a row

I had a hysterectomy and no longer have a cervix, do I still need cervical cancer screening?

Ask your doctor. In general you do not need to continue screening if you had a TOTAL hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix).

Continue pap tests if:

- You have a history of cervix cancer
- Cervical dysplasia (abnormal pap tests)

I had the HPV vaccine, do I need cervical cancer screening?

Yes. The HPV vaccine decreases your chance of cervical cancer, but it does not provide complete protection.

What if my pap smear is abnormal?

Abnormal pap smears are very common, most people with an abnormal pap smear do not have cancer. If your cells appear “abnormal,” your doctor will do more test to determine the cause. Based on your age, your pap test and prior results follow up tests might include:

- An **HPV test** – if you have not had an HPV test, your doctor may order one. This is usually able to be done on the cells already taken during your initial pap smear.
- Repeat Pap test in 1 year – Often, previously abnormal cells will be normal in 1 year. You may also have an HPV test at that time.
- **Colposcopy**
 - o Your doctor will look at your cervix (similar to the pap test) however they will look closely with a device similar to a microscope. During this test the doctor may take a biopsy, which are samples of tissue, from the cervix.
 - o If the biopsy shows your have cervical cancer or precancer, there are effective treatments available

