

3. Cells are taken from the cervix with a small spatula. A small brush is then used to remove cells from inside the cervical canal. You may feel pressure or slight discomfort.

The sample is then sent to the lab to be analyzed.



After the Test

You're free to go! There is a slight chance of light bleeding or spotting. Your healthcare provider will tell you when to expect your test results.

Getting Your Results

Normal test : The cells in the sample appear healthy. Have your next Pap test as recommended your healthcare provider.

Abnormal test : The lab saw something unusual in your sample. Talk with your healthcare provider about what the results mean. You may need to repeat the Pap test or have other tests to evaluate the problem.

Healthy Habits

To stay healthier and reduce your risk of cervical cancer:

- **Practice safer sex :** This reduces the risk that you will become infected with HPV or any other STD. Safer sex practices include limiting the number of sexual partners you have and using latex condoms each time you have sex. Ask your healthcare provider for more guidelines.
- **Don't smoke :** Smoking increases the chance of abnormal cervical changes if you have HPV.

Whether or not your result is normal, you still need regular Pap tests and pelvic exams in the future.

Procedure Pap Test



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This brochure is not intended as a substitute for professional dental care.

What Is a Pap Test?

A Pap test is a procedure that helps find changes in the cervix that may lead to cancer. (The cervix is the part of the uterus that opens into the vagina.) For this test, a small sample of cells is taken from the cervix. The cells are then analyzed in a lab. A Pap test is a safe procedure. It takes just a few minutes and causes little or no discomfort.



Why Have a Pap Test?

Early on, problems in the cervix produce no symptoms. Often, the only way to know about cervical changes is to do a Pap test. A Pap test can find cervical problems early, when they are easier to treat. Pap tests can also detect some infections of the cervix and vagina.

Who Should Have a Pap Test?

Ask your healthcare provider when to start having Pap tests, and how often to have them. He or she may advise you to have Pap tests more often or earlier than the guidelines listed below.

- A first Pap test within 3 years of first having sexual intercourse, or by age 21.
- A Pap test every 1 to 2 years after that.
- A Pap test every 2 to 3 years if, by age 30, you have had 3 normal Pap tests in a row.
- A Pap test each year if you have a risk factor for cervical cancer.
- If you're over 70 and have had 3 normal results in a row, no abnormal results in the last 10 years, and no risk factors, you may not need to continue having Pap tests.

The HPV Connection

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a family of viruses that spread through skin contact, almost always sexual contact. Some HPV types cause genital warts. But not all types of HPV cause visible symptoms. Some types cause cell changes in the cervix that can lead to cancer. That's why it's important to have Pap tests as recommended by your healthcare provider. This helps ensure that any abnormal cells will be found and treated before they become cancerous.

Getting Ready

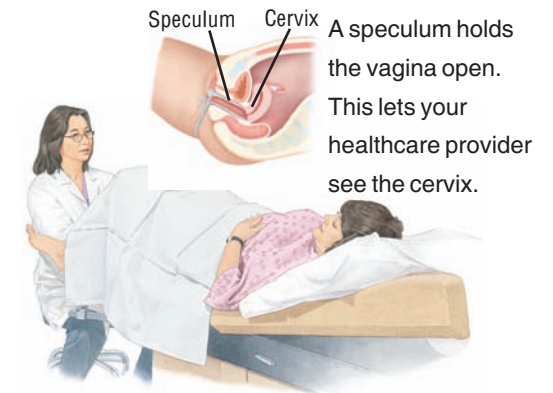
Schedule your test for a time when you will not be having your period. If you're menstruating at the time of your appointment, call your healthcare provider to ask if you should reschedule.

For 48 hours before the test:

- Do not douche.
- Do not use vaginal medications, creams, or spermicides.

For 24 hours before the test:

- Do not have sexual intercourse.



How the Test Is Done

1. You lie on an exam table with your feet in stirrups (foot rests). This is the usual position for a pelvic exam (an exam of the reproductive organs).
2. Your healthcare provider uses a speculum (a metal or plastic instrument) to gently open the vagina.