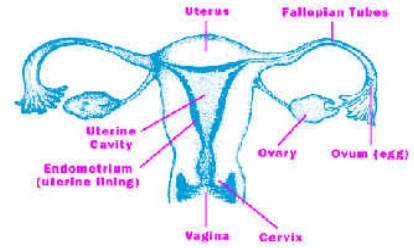


Information Sheet on Pap Smears

What is a Pap Smear?

The Pap smear checks for changes in the cells of your cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. During a Pap smear, cells are collected from the cervix, then put on a slide and sent to a lab for examination. The Pap smear does not test for pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, vaginal infections or other types of problems.



Why do I need a Pap smear?

Cancer of the cervix (cervical cancer) is a common cancer in women. A Pap smear can find unhealthy cells before they become cancer. When found early, treatment is usually successful and there is a great chance for being cured.

Do all women need Pap smears? How often do I need to get one?

Pap smears are recommended for all women starting at age 21, or 3 years after they start having sex (whichever comes first). Women 30 years of age and older who have had normal Pap smears 3 years in a row may have a Pap smear every 2-3 years. It may be recommended to do Pap smears more often in some situations. Even if you don't need a Pap smear, you will need a pelvic exam (a physical exam of the labia, vagina, ovaries and uterus) once a year.

Is there anything special I need to do before going for a Pap smear?

For two days before the test, do not put anything in your vagina. This means that you should not douche, use tampons or have sexual intercourse. All of these can change test results by washing away or hiding abnormal cells. The best time to have a Pap smear is between 10 and 20 days after the first day of your last period.

What happens after the Pap smear is done?

If the cells are normal, no treatment is needed. If the cells aren't normal, more tests may be needed.

What do abnormal Pap smear results mean?

Abnormal results do not mean that a woman has cancer. What it does mean is that the cells were looked at, and some of them did not look normal or showed some kind of change. There are different levels of abnormal results, and it depends on how much the cells have changed and how many of the cells have changed.

What will happen if my Pap smear finds something that is not normal?

If the Pap test shows that some of the cells have changed, another Pap smear may be done in a few months. If a closer look of your cells is needed, your health care provider may look at your cervix through a special instrument called a colposcope. Tissue samples may be taken at this time for more evaluation.

Do sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) cause cancer of the cervix?

One type of STD, called genital warts or HPV, has been linked to cancer of the cervix. HPV can cause wart-like growths on the genitals, but you can have HPV even if you can't see any warts. When it is not treated or happens frequently, it can increase a woman's chances of developing cancer of the cervix. HPV is a very common STD, especially in younger women and women with more than one sexual partner.

What increases a woman's risk for cancer of the cervix?

Any woman can get cervical cancer but the chances of getting cancer of the cervix increase when a woman:

- Starts having sex before age 18
- Has many sexual partners
- Has sexual partners who have other sexual partners
- Smoke
- Is over the age of 60
- Has or has had HPV or genital warts
- Has or has had a sexually transmitted disease (STD)