

# Abnormal Pap + HPV Test: What You Should Know



*Take good care of your health,  
for you, and  
for those you care about.*



**Family PACT**  
Planning • Access • Care • Treatment

(916)650-0414 [fampact@dhcs.ca.gov](mailto:fampact@dhcs.ca.gov)

## The Pap + HPV test can save lives.

The Pap + HPV test (also called a “co-test”) checks for human papilloma virus (high-risk HPV) infection and changes in the cells of the cervix (the opening of the uterus) in people 30 and older that could lead to cancer of the cervix.

When certain types of high-risk HPV are present or when abnormal changes are found, treatment is needed before cancer of the cervix develops. The earlier a person gets treatment, the better!

## When a Pap + HPV test is positive, what does that mean?

If a Pap + HPV test is positive, it usually does not mean there is cancer of the cervix. An abnormal test result means:

- There are abnormal cells on the cervix that may need to be treated.

AND/OR

- There is an infection with a high-risk type of HPV. HPV types 16 and 18 are the most likely to cause abnormal cells on the cervix.

## What should be done next?

Most of the time, minor cell changes or an HPV infection will go away on their own. Your provider may want you to come back for a Pap + HPV test in 12 months.

Or you may be asked to have a special exam of your cervix called a colposcopy.

## What happens during a colposcopy?

**This careful look at your cervix does not hurt and may be all that is needed.**

- During this exam, the provider will use a bright light and a magnifying lens to examine your cervix.



**My provider explained the exam to me.**

The provider also may need to do a biopsy at the same time.

- A tiny bit of cervical tissue is taken and sent to a lab.
- During the biopsy, you may feel a little pinch or some mild cramping.

## What happens after these exams?

Some people will need no treatment at all and will have follow-up exams only. Other people will need an office treatment to remove the abnormal cells.

Your provider will talk to you about what treatment you may need. The treatment will depend on the type of high-risk HPV, abnormal cells, and location they are found.

## Get the care you need. Don't wait!

The important thing is to get the treatment you need when your provider recommends it.

- Talk with your provider about anything you don't understand or, worried about.
- Keep asking questions until you get answers that you understand.
- Get the tests and exams you need. Don't put them off!

## Protect yourself from cancer of the cervix!

- Get a Pap + HPV test as often as your provider recommends.
- Get the follow-up care you need. Don't wait.
- If you are younger than 46 years old, ask about the HPV vaccine.
- Don't smoke cigarettes. Smoking increases the chances of developing cancer of the cervix.
- Using condoms every time you have sex. It may lower the chances you will be infected with other types of HPV that can cause cancer of the cervix.