



ABNORMAL PAP TEST: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



What is an abnormal Pap test?

The Pap test checks for abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. The cervix is the opening of the uterus. These changes can sometimes lead to cancer if they are not managed. When these changes are found on a Pap test, your provider will do more tests to figure out what is causing the changes and whether you need any treatment. Following up on these changes is important.



When is a Pap test abnormal and what does it mean?

An abnormal Pap test rarely means there is cancer. Most of the time, an abnormal Pap test result means:

- » There are abnormal cells on the cervix. Some types of abnormal cells can become cancer if not treated.
- » There may be an infection with human papilloma virus (HPV). Certain high-risk types of HPV are more likely to cause changes on the cervix that can lead to cancer.



What if there are abnormal cell changes?

Most of the time, abnormal cell changes will go away on their own. Your provider may want you to come back for another Pap test in 12 months or be tested for high-risk types of HPV.

Your provider may ask you to have a special exam of your cervix called a colposcopy.



What happens during a colposcopy?

The provider will use a bright light and a special magnifying lens. They are used to carefully examine your cervix. This careful look at your cervix does not hurt and may be all that is needed.

The provider may also need to do a biopsy at the same time. A biopsy is when the provider takes a tiny bit of cervical tissue sample and sends it to a lab. During the biopsy, you may feel a little pinch or some mild cramping.



What happens after these exams?

The results of the biopsy test will determine the next steps. 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 and location of the abnormal cells.



What do I do after the exams?

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 are worried about.
- » Keep asking questions until you get answers that you understand.
- » Get the tests and exams you need. Don't put them off!



How do I protect myself?

Make sure to do the following:

- » Get the follow-up care and testing your provider recommends.
- » If you are younger than 46 years old, ask about the HPV vaccine.
- » Don't smoke cigarettes. Smoking increases the chances of developing cervical cancer.
- » Use condoms every time you have sex. It may help prevent exposure to and infection from other types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.



Where can I get tested?

Finding a Family PACT provider near you is easy.

- » Visit www.FamilyPACT.org and select "Find Providers."
- » Call 1-800-942-1054 and get a listing of local Family PACT providers.
- » Pap tests are free for Family PACT clients if part of a family planning visit.



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