



PAP TEST: WHAT TO EXPECT



What is a Pap test?

A Pap test, also known as a Pap smear or Papanicolaou test checks your cervix (the opening of the uterus) for cellular changes that sometimes can lead to cancer. If these changes are found, you will need additional tests or another Pap test sooner than usual. Following up on an abnormal Pap test as recommended by your provider is important because it is the best way to prevent cervical cancer.



What causes cancer of the cervix?

Cervical cancer is caused by certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV). It is passed by skin-to-skin contact and can be spread during any sex that includes the vagina, penis, anus, or mouth.

There are many types of HPV:

- » Some HPV types can cause genital warts, but genital warts do not cause cancer.
- » Other “high risk” HPV types can lead to cancer in the cervix, vulva, anus, and even the mouth and throat.

Most HPV infections go away on their own and cause no problems.

There are ways you can lower your chances of getting an HPV infection. You can:

- » Get vaccinated against HPV. This can be done up to 45 years of age.
- » Have sex with only one person who only has

sex with you.

- » Use condoms every time you have sex.
- » Choose not to have any sexual contact.
- » Stop smoking cigarettes.



What should I do ahead of time?

If this is your first Pap test, you may be a little worried. It may help to know what to expect. For 24 hours before the visit, do not:

- » Use creams in your vagina.
- » Wash or douche inside the vagina.
- » Put any medicine in your vagina.



What happens during the Pap test?

Your provider will ask you questions about your medical history. You may have your blood pressure taken. You will be asked to put on a gown and undress from the waist down.

Your provider will explain what to expect. First, you will put a sheet over your stomach and legs. Then you will lie down on a table. The provider will ask you to put your feet on the footrests at the end of the table. This will widen your legs, so the provider can see your vulva (skin around the opening of your vagina).

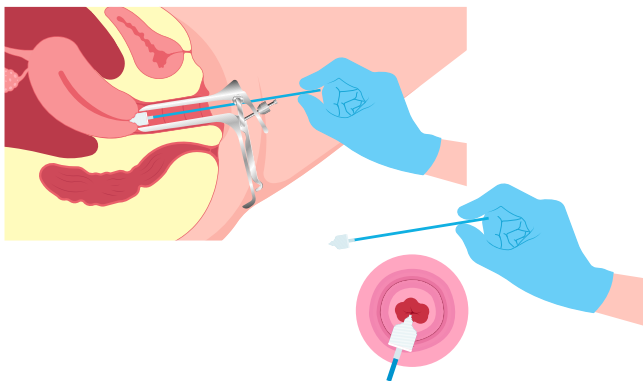


What can I expect during the Pap test?

Your provider will gently place a speculum (a medical instrument that makes it easier for your provider to see inside your vagina) into your vagina. It opens the vagina just enough to be able to see your cervix.

- » Your provider will gently swab the opening of your cervix with a small brush. This takes a sample of cells. This just takes a minute or two.
- » You may feel some discomfort, but it should not hurt. Tell your provider if it does.
- » It may help to take long, slow, deep breaths to help relax your muscles.
- » The sample of cells will be sent to the lab.

Your provider may ask for your permission to do tests for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They may also look for vaginal infections.



What happens after the Pap test?

Your provider will talk to you about:

- » When you will hear about the Pap test result, which can take 1-3 weeks.
- » When you will need your next Pap test.



Can I get the Pap test while on my period?

Yes. You can get a Pap test while on your period, but it's best to check with your provider first.



How often should I get a Pap test?

It depends.

- » You should have your first Pap test when you are 21 years old. If the results are normal, get tested every 3 years until you are 30.
- » If you have never had vaginal sex, ask your provider if you need a pap test.
- » If you are between 30 and 65 years old, you have 3 different screening options:
 - » Have a Pap test every 3 years.
 - » Have an HPV test every 5 years.
 - » Have a Pap and an HPV test (co-testing) every 5 years.

Some people may need more frequent testing, especially if you have had an abnormal test result in the past. Your Family PACT provider will discuss how often you should come in for testing.



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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