



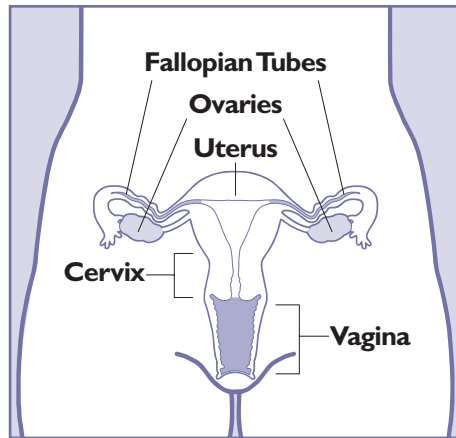
# Cervical Cancer

## BASIC FACTS ON SCREENING AND THE PAP TEST

### What is Cervical Cancer?

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When these abnormal cells are present in the cervix, it is called cervical cancer, or cancer of the cervix.

As the drawing shows, the cervix is the lower, narrower part of the uterus. The uterus is also known as the womb. The upper part of the uterus is where a baby grows when a woman is pregnant. The cervix connects the upper part of the uterus to the vagina (the birth canal).



### Important Facts About Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer can usually be prevented if women are screened regularly with a test called the Pap test.
- It is estimated that during 2003, about 12,200 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and 4,100 women will die of the disease.
- Any woman who has a cervix can get cervical cancer, especially if she or her sexual partner has had sex with several other partners.
- Most often, cervical cancer develops in women aged 40 or older.
- Abnormal cells in the cervix and cervical cancer don't always cause symptoms, especially at first. That's why getting tested for cervical cancer is important, even if there are no symptoms.
- When it is found early and treated, cervical cancer is highly curable.
- Most deaths from cervical cancer could be avoided if women had regular checkups with the Pap test.

### Screening Prevents Cervical Cancer and Saves Lives

The Pap test can find abnormal cells in the cervix. These cells may, over time, turn into cancer. This could take several years to happen.

If the results of a Pap test show there are abnormal cells that could become cancerous, a woman can be treated. In most cases, this treatment prevents cervical cancer from developing.

Pap tests can also find cervical cancer early. When it is found early, the chance of being cured is very high.

The most important thing you can do to avoid getting cervical cancer is to have regular Pap tests.

### What is the Pap Test?

The Pap test, also called the Pap smear, is a cervical cancer screening test. It is not used to detect other kinds of cancer. It is done in a doctor's office or a clinic. This test can find abnormal cells in the cervix that may turn into cancer if they're not treated.

During the test, the doctor or nurse uses a plastic or metal instrument, called a speculum, to widen the vagina. This helps the doctor or nurse examine the vagina and the cervix, and collect a few cells and mucus from the cervix and the area around it. These cells are placed on a slide and sent to a laboratory to be checked for abnormal cells.

The doctor or nurse also performs a pelvic exam, checking the uterus, ovaries and other organs to make sure there are no problems. There are times when a doctor may perform a pelvic exam without giving you a Pap test. Ask your doctor or nurse which tests you're having, if you're unsure.

## Who Should Have a Pap Test?

Doctors recommend that women begin having regular Pap tests and pelvic exams at age 21, or within three years of the first time they have sexual intercourse – whichever happens first. National guidelines recommend that after a woman has a Pap test each year for three years in a row, and test results show there are no problems, she can then get the Pap test once every 2–3 years.

## Who Does Not Need to be Tested?

The only women who do not need regular Pap tests are:

- Those over age 65 who have had regular Pap tests with normal results and have been told by their doctors that they don't need to be tested anymore.
- Women who do not have a cervix. This includes women whose cervix was removed as part of an operation to remove the uterus. (The surgery is called a hysterectomy.) However, a small number of women who have had this operation still have a cervix and should continue having regular Pap tests. If you're not sure whether you have a cervix, speak to your doctor about it.

## How Do I Prepare for the Pap Test?

To prepare for the Pap test, doctors recommend that for two days before the test you should avoid:

- Douching
- Using tampons
- Having sexual intercourse
- Using birth control foams, creams, or jellies or vaginal medications or creams

Doctors also recommend that you try to schedule your Pap test for a time when you are not having your menstrual period.

## When Will I Get the Results?

It can take up to three weeks to receive Pap test results. Most results are normal. But if your test shows something may be abnormal, the doctor or nurse will contact you and probably want to do more tests. There are many reasons that Pap test results can be abnormal, and usually it does not mean you have cancer.

## How Do I Get a Free or Low-Cost Pap Test?

Free or low-cost Pap tests and mammograms are available to eligible women through programs funded by the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. These programs and others that offer free or low-cost Pap tests and mammograms are available throughout the country.

To find out if you are eligible and to find locations that offer free or low-cost Pap tests and mammograms, call your state or local health department.

You can also call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service: 1-800-4-CANCER.

Text telephone (TTY) users should call 1-800-332-9615 or visit

[www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp).

## Place State/Local Dept of Health or Program Information Here

