

Pap tests

**Help protect
yourself from
cervical cancer**



*PapScreen
Victoria*



**Cancer
Council**
Victoria

What is a Pap test?

A Pap test is a quick and simple test to check for unhealthy changes to the cells of the cervix. Repeating the test every two years is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer.



The Pap test does not test for cervical cancer, but looks for unhealthy changes in the cervix, which if left untreated may progress to cancer.

Identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Letting your doctor or nurse know your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status will help organisations such as PapScreen Victoria increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women having regular Pap tests. Over time, this should mean the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women being diagnosed with, and dying from, cervical cancer will decrease.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) and the cervical cancer vaccine

Cervical cancer is almost always caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is passed on through genital-skin to genital-skin contact. HPV is a normal part of being sexually active – four out of five women will have HPV at some point in their lives.

A cervical cancer vaccine is available which helps to protect you from HPV and cervical cancer. The vaccine is available free of charge in schools to girls aged 12–13. Vaccinating girls at this age gives good protection from the majority of cervical cancers.

Any female aged 9 to 45 years can have the cervical cancer vaccine, although it may not work as well in women who have already had sex. Ask your doctor, Aboriginal health worker or community health clinic if it would be good for you to have the vaccine. Unless you are having the vaccine as part of the free school program, the vaccine costs around \$450 in total.

Even if you have had the vaccine, it's really important to carry on having a Pap test every two years between the ages of 18 and 70.

Who needs a Pap test?

All women between the ages of 18 and 70 who have ever been sexually active should have a Pap test every two years.

Sexual activity includes genital-skin to genital-skin contact. Lesbians need Pap tests too.

What if I've had a hysterectomy?

A hysterectomy is an operation to remove the uterus. In most cases the cervix is removed as well.

You might need to continue having Pap tests though, depending on whether the cervix was removed and the reason why you had a hysterectomy.

It's best to speak to your doctor, nurse or health worker about this.

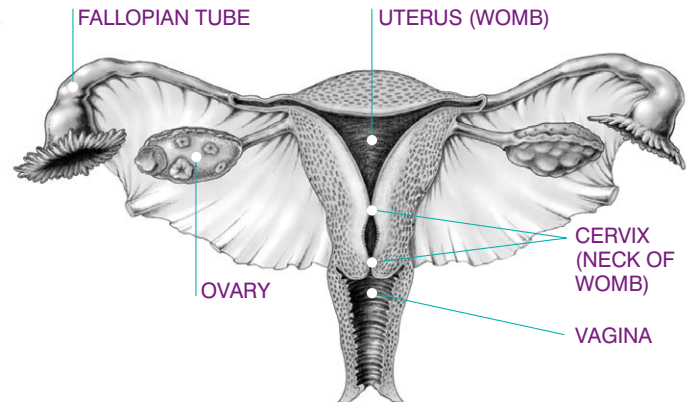
How is a Pap test done?

Call or visit your doctor or local Aboriginal health service and ask to make a time to have a Pap test. The Pap test is usually done in the doctor's consulting room or clinic.

The doctor or nurse will use an instrument called a speculum to open the vagina so that the cervix can be seen more clearly. Some cells are then taken from the cervix using a small brush. The cells are then put onto a glass slide and sent to a laboratory to be tested.

The Pap test might be a bit uncomfortable, but it shouldn't hurt. If it hurts, tell your doctor or nurse straight away.

THE FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM



What about the results?

Ask your doctor or health worker when and how you can get your results. Remember, most Pap test results are normal, but you need to have the test to make sure.

What if my results are not normal?

If your results are not normal, this does not mean you have cancer. It may be something simple like an infection that will clear up naturally. Some types of unhealthy cells may need further treatment.

Ask your doctor, nurse or health worker about treatment options.

How effective are Pap tests?

The Pap test is not perfect, but it is the best test there is to find any changes in the cells of the cervix, before they can turn into cancer.

If your results are not normal, this does not mean you have cancer.

Pap test reminders

When you have your Pap test, your name goes on the Victorian Pap Test Registry. A reminder letter will be sent to you when you are due or overdue for your next Pap test.

This is a private and confidential service.

If you do not want to get reminder letters, tell your doctor or nurse when you have your test.

Where can I go to have a Pap test?

- › Your doctor
- › An Aboriginal health service
- › Some women's and community health centres
- › Well Women's services at hospitals

Remember, you should have a Pap test even if you are healthy. This is because cervical cancer and unhealthy cervical cell changes usually have no symptoms.

If you have any problems, like unexpected bleeding, you should see your doctor immediately, even if you recently had a normal Pap test.

For more information on Pap tests and Pap test results, or if you're not sure where to go for your Pap test contact the Cancer Council Helpline on **13 11 20**, visit **papscreen.org.au** or visit your local Aboriginal health service.

For more information about the cervical cancer vaccine visit **cervicalcancervaccine.org.au**

Artwork by Kahli Luttrell.

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