



Pap tests

What if my Pap test is abnormal?



*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.



An abnormal Pap test very rarely means cancer.

What is an abnormal Pap test?

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.

An abnormal Pap test means some of the cells of the cervix are different to the regular cells. It very rarely means cancer.

There are many reasons a result can be abnormal. It may be something simple like inflammation, or an infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV).

HPV is passed on through genital skin to genital skin contact and is a normal part of being sexually active – four out of five women will have HPV at some point in their lives. Most of the time it clears the body naturally, but sometimes it doesn't. If HPV doesn't clear the body and the abnormal cells in the cervix remain, it can lead to cancer.

What are the different types of abnormalities?

LOW-GRADE ABNORMALITIES

Sometimes very minor changes to the cervical cells are detected. These changes may be due to inflammation or an infection with HPV.

HIGH-GRADE ABNORMALITIES

High-grade abnormalities are more serious changes to the cells of the cervix. These should not be left untreated. If they are not treated, you have a much greater chance of developing cervical cancer.

OTHER ABNORMALITIES

There are some other abnormalities that may be found on your Pap test. If this happens your doctor will talk to you about the results.

There are many reasons a result can be abnormal. It may be something simple like inflammation, or an infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV).

How are abnormal cells treated?

Women with low-grade abnormalities will be asked to have more frequent Pap tests to see if the unhealthy cells have disappeared. Some women may need a colposcopy.

A colposcopy is an internal examination where the doctor uses an instrument called a colposcope to look closely at the cervical cells. During the colposcopy, a tiny piece of tissue may be taken (a biopsy) and sent to a laboratory to be tested.

For women with high-grade abnormalities, there are a number of options for treatment, depending on the abnormality. Different methods are used to remove the unhealthy cells from the cervix, and a day's stay in hospital may be needed.

Do I need Pap tests after treatment?

Yes, you will need to keep having regular Pap tests. Your doctor will tell you how often.

Can I still get pregnant after treatment?

Yes. However, some treatments may weaken the cervix. While it's still possible to get pregnant, a stitch may be needed to strengthen the cervix.

Who can I talk to?

If you want more information about abnormal Pap test results you can talk to:

- › Your doctor
- › An Aboriginal health worker
- › A women's health nurse.

You can also call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

For more information on Pap test results and abnormalities or to order the booklet, *Pap Test Results – A guide for women with an abnormal Pap test*, contact the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for the cost of a local call, go to www.papscreen.org.au or visit your local Aboriginal health service.



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