

Information

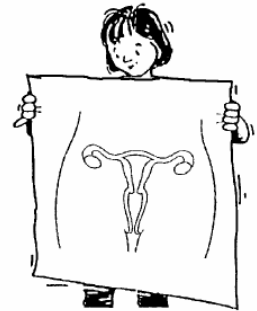
The Pap test: a way to prevent cervical cancer

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix. The cervix is located between the uterus and the vagina. Pap tests detect abnormal cells that may be found on the cervix. Pap tests do not pick up cancer, but can find changes that may lead to cancer. Finding changes early means they can be treated well before cancer develops. In Australia there is a very successful cervical screening program that reduces the rate of cervical cancer in women.

Who needs a Pap test?

All women aged between 18 and 70 years who have ever been sexually active need to have a Pap test every two years.



What is a Pap test?

The Pap test is a quick and simple test used to check for changes to the cells of the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer. The Pap test only takes a couple of minutes. The Pap test is taken in the following way:

- A doctor or specially trained nurse will do the test. You will need to undress from the waist down and lie on your back or side.
- The doctor or nurse will insert an instrument called a speculum into the vagina. The speculum opens the vagina so that the cervix can be seen clearly.
- The test should not be painful but may be a bit uncomfortable. If the Pap test hurts, tell the doctor or nurse immediately.
- The doctor or nurse will take a sample of cells from the surface of the cervix using a small spatula or brush and place them onto a glass slide.



Results are usually available within a week or two. Speak to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns about your Pap test and how it is conducted.

Please turn over...

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What if my results are abnormal?



If your results are abnormal, this does not mean you have cancer. One in 15 Pap test results may return with abnormal changes. Most of these changes are minor infections that can be easily treated or clear up on their own. If you have abnormal changes your doctor will advise you of the best treatment. This may include more frequent Pap tests.

Why every two years?

Most cases of cervical cancer take at least 10 years to develop. Having a Pap test every two years makes sure that if any changes are present, they can be treated before they develop into cancer.

Where can you have a Pap test?

You can visit a medical practice (GP or doctor), community health centre, family planning clinic or sexual health centre to have a Pap test. When making your appointment you can ask to see a female doctor or nurse. If you have any other special needs such as a longer appointment or interpreter let them know at this time.

You can ask a relative or friend to come with you to your appointment. The details of your appointment and results are strictly confidential.

For more information about Pap tests visit papscreen.org.au or call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 or Multilingual Cancer Information Line on 03 9209 0169.

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