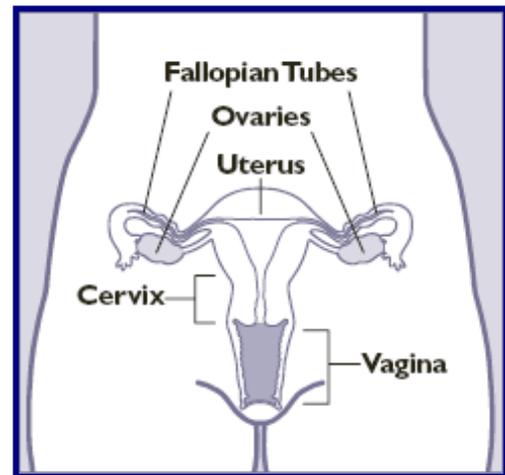


CERVICAL CANCER: SCREENING IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Cervical cancer can be treated easily when it's found early. Finding cervical cancer early is done with a screening test called the "Pap Smear".

What is the Pap Smear test?

This test is done during a pelvic exam. Using a special swab, cells are gently scraped from the cervix. The cervix is where the uterus opens into the vagina. The cells are then sent to a lab where they are examined under a microscope. If abnormal cells are found, more tests are needed to tell if these are early cancer cells.



When should you have your first Pap test?

You should have your first Pap test when you are 21, or within 3 years of your first sexual intercourse, whichever is sooner.

How often should you get a Pap test?

After you have had several normal, yearly Pap tests, you and your doctor should discuss how often to have Pap tests in the future. Women who have had normal Pap tests in the past, and who are at low risk for cervical cancer, don't need a yearly test and can go up to 3 years between tests. You are at low risk if:

- You don't smoke.
- You have only one current sexual partner.
- You haven't had recent sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, or herpes.
- Your mother did not take DES when she was pregnant with you.
- You don't have a history of cervical cancer or pre-cancerous cells of the cervix.

When can you stop having Pap tests?

If you are over the age of 65, have had recent normal Pap tests, you can probably stop having Pap tests.

Do you need a Pap test if you have had a hysterectomy (uterus removal)?

If you have had a hysterectomy, then your cervix has been removed and you do not need to have regular Pap tests. But if your hysterectomy was done specifically to remove cancer, talk with your doctor to see if you should continue to get pelvic examinations and Pap tests of the vagina.

How should you prepare for a Pap test?

Little preparation is needed for a Pap test. To make the test as accurate as possible, do not schedule your Pap test during your menstrual period. For 2 days before the test, it is best to avoid:

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

How will you get your Pap test results?

It depends on your clinic. Ask your doctor or nurse when and how you will get the results from your Pap test.

When was your last Pap test?

Call your VA clinic and make an appointment today!