

How is screening done?

- Schedule your Pap test with your provider. During the exam, a metal or plastic device, called a speculum, is placed in your vagina to reach the cervix. Next, a small brush is used to collect a small sample of cells on your cervix. The cells are placed in a bottle and sent to the lab for testing to look at the cells and sometimes also for the presence of HPV.
- Pap tests usually do not hurt, but if you are scared, or if you had a bad experience with a Pap test exam before, please let your provider know. Your provider may be able to use a smaller speculum or help in some other way.
- As part of the exam, your provider may also examine your vagina, ovaries and uterus by placing his/her fingers in your vagina and feeling your lower belly.

What if my Pap smear shows something that is not normal (an “abnormal” result)?

- **Abnormal** Pap test results can vary from mild to moderate to severely abnormal.
- Most of the time, abnormal pap test results do not mean that you have cancer.
- If your Pap test is not normal, your provider will either repeat it, possibly sooner than usual, or refer you to a specialist for further testing.

Where can I get more information?

- **Cervical Cancer Home Page**
National Cancer Institute:
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/cervical>
- **Cervical Cancer Prevention (Patient)**
National Cancer Institute:
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/prevention/cervical/patient>
- **Healthfinder.gov**
Cervical Cancer Screening information:
<http://healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicID=13>

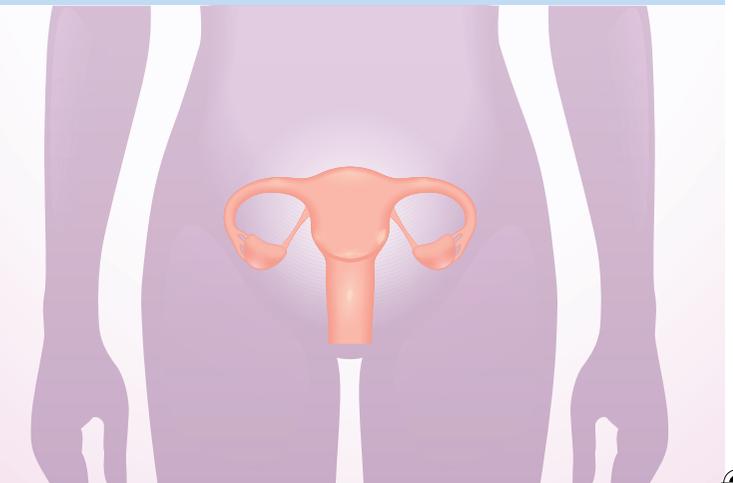
Here are some questions to ask your provider:

- How often do I need a Pap test?
- If my Pap test is abnormal, how will I be contacted?
- Should I receive the HPV vaccine?

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
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Patient Care Services
Health Promotion and Disease Prevention



Talk With Your Health Care Provider About Cervical Cancer Screening

WOMEN'S HEALTH

VA



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IB 10-526 P96595 June 2013

What is the cervix and how does a woman get cervical cancer?

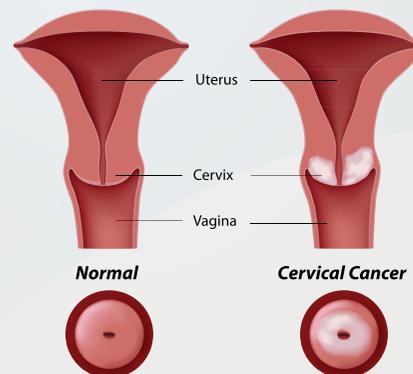
- The cervix is a small, donut-shaped opening at the top of the vagina that leads into the uterus. The cervix allows menstrual blood to leave the uterus during a woman's period, and allows sperm to enter the uterus during sex. During pregnancy the cervix stays closed, and then during labor the cervix opens to allow for the birth of the infant.
- The cells of the cervix are easily infected by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV can be spread from one person to another during sex. Condoms do NOT prevent the spread of HPV, but they do protect from other sexually transmitted infections.



- Cancer starts when cells grow out of control. Cancer starts in one place, but over time may spread to other parts of the body if it is not found early and treated.
- Changes to the cervix caused by HPV can be found by a Pap test. Most of the time, a woman's infection-fighting system can remove the virus from the body. Sometimes the virus stays in a woman's cervix and causes changes that may later become cancer if not removed. This process takes several years.
- The HPV vaccine may help women fight certain types of HPV, but not all.
- In countries where Pap tests are not done routinely, many women die from cervical cancer. In the United States, where most women get routine Pap tests, death from cervical cancer is uncommon.

How can I prevent cervical cancer?

- Get regular Pap tests.
- Get the HPV vaccine (Gardasil® or Cervarix®) between the ages of 11 and 26. The HPV vaccine is a series of three shots, usually given over 6 months.



What is screening?

- Screening means looking for something when there are no signs that anything is wrong.
- If you are having any signs of concern such as bleeding during or after sex, bleeding in between periods, or irregular spotting the ages and screening intervals in this pamphlet do not apply. Please call your health care team to schedule a visit.

When should I begin cervical cancer screening?

- Start getting Pap tests at age 21. You should not get a Pap test for screening sooner than age 21 even if you started having sex as a teenager.

How often should I have cervical cancer screening?

- Get a Pap test every 3 years from age 21 to 30 years.
- When you are 30 years or older, you may decide to get a Pap test every 5 years if you are tested for the presence of HPV at the time of your Pap test, or you may continue getting the Pap test by itself every 3 years. Discuss this with your provider.
- If you have had your uterus removed by surgery (a hysterectomy) because of a condition other than cervical cancer, you probably do not need to continue getting Pap tests. Discuss this with your provider.
- If your Pap test shows something that's not normal, the timing of your next Pap test may change. Discuss this with your provider.