

Pap Tests

P A P T E S T S

A Pap test looks for signs of cervical cancer. This test is also called a Pap “smear.”

It's very important to find cervical cancer early. But there are no early signs or symptoms. There is nothing that a woman can see or feel. The only way to catch the disease in its early stages is with a Pap test.

What is cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer is a serious disease in which some cells in your cervix change. They become abnormal (unhealthy) and grow out of control. These cells can spread and damage healthy parts of your body. This kind of cancer can also be fatal if it is not found early.

What is my cervix?

- The cervix is the lower part of the womb, which opens into the birth canal (vagina).

What is a Pap test?

- A Pap test uses a small brush to take some cells from inside and outside of the cervix. A doctor then checks the cells to see if they are healthy.

How often should I get a Pap test?

- You should get a Pap test every year as part of your routine pelvic exam.

What are the signs of cervical cancer?

- There are no clear signs of cervical cancer. It tends to grow slowly over time. By the time there are symptoms, it may be too late to treat it. That's why it's very important to get a Pap test every year.
- One of the symptoms of advanced cervical cancer is bleeding from the vagina when you are not having a period. It may happen after sex or douching, between periods, or after menopause.

What are the treatments for cervical cancer?

- The treatment you get depends on your cancer. Doctors look at its size, kind, and location. They also bear in mind your age, health, and whether or not you want to have children.

Three kinds of treatment for cervical cancer:

1. Surgery — taking out the cancer in an operation
2. Radiation therapy — using high-dose x-rays to kill cancer cells
3. Chemotherapy — using medicine to kill cancer cells

What if I am pregnant and need treatment?

- Sometimes treatment can wait until after you have the baby.

Pap Tests (cont.)

Why are some women more likely to get cervical cancer than other women?

Your chances are higher if you:

1. Start having sex before you are 18
2. Have had sex with many partners
3. Have or have had HPV (Human Papillomavirus)
4. Have or have had an STD (sexually transmitted disease)
5. Have or have had sex partners with STDs or HIV/AIDS
6. Are over 60
7. Smoke
8. Have a poor diet

To Learn More...

National Women's Health Information Center
Phone: 1-800-994-9662

American Cancer Society
Phone: 1-800-227-2345
Web: <http://www.cancer.org>

Cancer Information Service
Phone: 1-800-332-8615
Web: <http://cis.nci.nih.gov>

Food and Drug Administration
Web: www.fda.gov