

abnormal pap smear

causes and proper follow-up





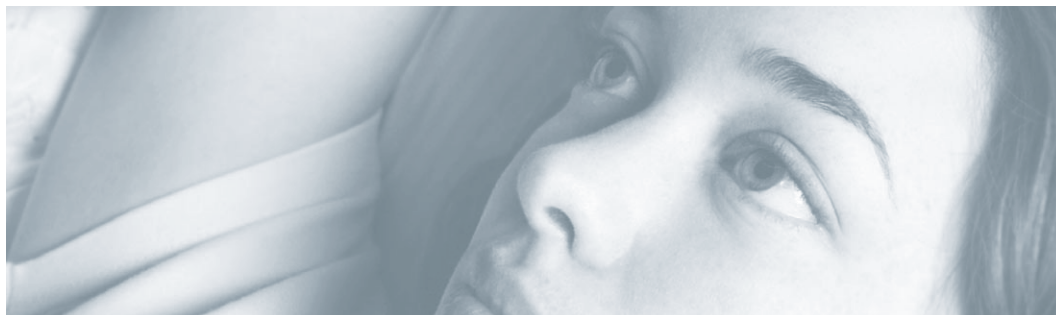
What does an abnormal Pap test result mean?

Cervical cancer can occur when cells of the cervix become abnormal and start to grow in an uncontrolled fashion. The goal of cervical screening (Pap test) is to find these abnormal cervical cells at an early stage when they can be easily removed to prevent cancer. Pap test can also find cervical cancer but this is extremely rare in women who are regularly screened.

What causes an abnormal Pap test result?

Almost all cervical cancers are caused by certain types of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are more than 100 types of HPV and about 40 of these can infect the genital area. Some of the genital HPV types cause genital warts and about 15 others can cause cervical cancer. HPV is very common. Most adults will have had HPV at some time in their lives and it will usually go away on its own without any problem. There are treatments for the HPV types that cause genital warts, but these have not been shown to work for the HPV types that cause cervical cancer.

For some women, the HPV will not go away. Over time, the HPV can cause abnormal cervical cells that can change to cervical cancer. Pap tests find cervical cell changes that need to be followed up.



Did you know?

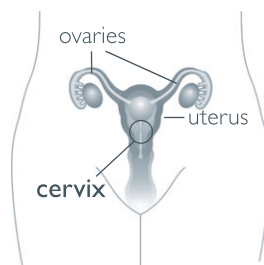
Cervical screening (Pap test) finds abnormal cervical cell changes that need to be followed up.



Abnormal Pap test results

This depends on the degree of abnormal cell changes found on the Pap test. Several results are possible:

Mild atypia: This means that mildly abnormal cervical cells have been found. The mildly abnormal cells usually return to normal with time. To check on this, you will be asked to have a Pap test every 6 months for 2 years. If the mild atypia does not go away in 2 years, you will be referred to a specialist for a closer examination of your cervix to confirm the Pap test finding.



Moderate or more severe atypia: This means that the abnormal cervical cells show moderate or more severe changes. Only a small number of women with this finding will actually have cancer. If you have moderate or more severe atypia, you will be referred to a specialist for a closer examination of your cervix.

Follow-up of an abnormal Pap test result

Your doctor or nurse practitioner will review your Pap test result, your screening history and any other medical conditions you may have to decide what should happen next. The following procedures may be recommended:

Repeat Pap test: This is the most common follow-up for mildly abnormal cervical cells. Most mildly abnormal cervical cells will go away

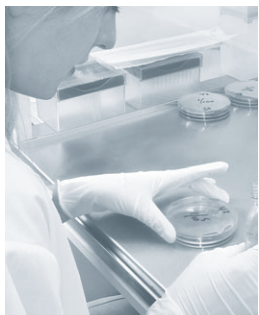
on their own with time. To monitor the cell changes, Pap tests are repeated every 6 months for 2 years.

Colposcopy: A colposcopy is a procedure done by a specialist. A colposcopy is very similar to having a Pap test taken except that a special microscope, called a colposcope, is used to examine your cervix more closely. Colposcopy should not be done during your period. Sex, douching or using treatments, lubricants or foam inside your vagina should be avoided for 48 hours prior to your appointment.

You will be asked to lie on your back as you would when a Pap test is taken. As with a Pap test, an instrument called a speculum will be gently inserted into your vagina to allow the cervix to be clearly seen. Next, one or two liquids may be applied to the cervix to highlight any abnormal areas.

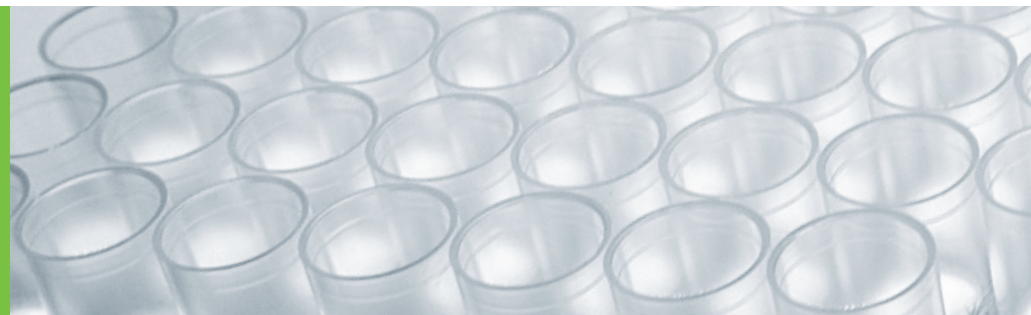
If no abnormalities are found during the colposcopy, you will be advised to have a follow up Pap test. If any area of concern is found, a cervical biopsy will be taken to help decide if treatment is needed or not.

Cervical Biopsy: A cervical biopsy is a procedure done with colposcopy to take a small sample of tissue from the area of concern on the cervix. Most women only feel a slight pinch when the biopsy is taken. The tissue sample will be sent to the laboratory where it will be examined under a microscope. A report will be sent to your specialist. You will then be contacted to discuss what needs to be done next.



Did you know?

Most of the abnormal cervical cell changes found on Pap tests are mild, and usually go away in 2 years without treatment.



High-quality screening can prevent 7 out of 10 cases of cervical cancer

Follow-up of an abnormal biopsy

What happens next will depend on your biopsy result, your past screening history and any other medical conditions that may increase your risk for cervical cancer. Abnormal cells on a biopsy are called Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia (CIN) and are graded as follows: CIN 1-3 or Carcinoma. In general:

CIN1: (mild abnormality) Since most abnormal cervical cells graded as CIN1 will return to normal on their own, you will be advised to have a repeat colposcopy in 6 months to see if the abnormal cells have gone away. If this colposcopy is normal, you will be advised to have a repeat Pap smear 12 months later. If the colposcopy finds anything abnormal, it is likely that you will be advised to have treatment to remove the abnormal area.

CIN2: (moderate abnormality) Although many abnormal cervical cells classified as CIN2 will return to normal on their own, there is a greater chance they could progress to cervical cancer. Because there is no way to tell which cells will return to normal and which will not, most women with this result will be advised to have treatment to remove the abnormal area.

CIN3: (severe abnormality) Abnormal cervical cells classified as CIN3 have a high chance of progressing to cervical cancer. All women with this result will be advised to return for treatment so the abnormal area can be removed.

Carcinoma: All women with cervical cells showing cancerous changes will be referred to the BC Cancer Agency for treatment.

Treatments for abnormal cervical cells

Abnormal cervical cells that do not disappear on their own, or that are severely abnormal, should be removed to decrease the chances of cervical cancer developing. Treatment methods include:

Cryotherapy: A small metal plate is cooled to below freezing and then placed on the abnormal area of the cervix to freeze away the abnormal cells.

Laser treatment: A laser is used to heat the abnormal cells so that they evaporate.

Loop diathermy: (also called LEEP or LLETZ) This is the most common and simple treatment used today. This procedure uses a small loop of wire that is heated by an electric current and used to remove the abnormal cells.

Cone biopsy: A cone biopsy is used to remove the abnormal cells by cutting a cone shaped piece of tissue from the cervix. This can be done using the wire loop (see Loop diathermy above), a laser or a special knife.



Did you know?

Regular screening is the best way to find abnormal cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer. Finding these changes early means simpler and more successful treatment.

Total hysterectomy: The complete removal of the uterus and cervix. This option may be advisable for some women.

What happens after treatment?

Following your treatment, you can expect to have a small amount of bleeding or vaginal discharge for about 3 or 4 weeks. During this time, you should:

- use pads, not tampons
- avoid strenuous exercise
- do not have sex for a month or until the bleeding stops and then only with condoms for another month while the area is healing

Treatment of CIN is usually very successful and most women will not have any more problems. A small number of women will continue to have abnormal Pap tests and some may need another treatment. It is very important to have regular follow-up Pap tests as recommended by your doctor after the treatment.



KEY POINTS:

- Cervical cancer can occur when cells of the cervix become abnormal and start to grow in an uncontrolled fashion.
- Cervical screening (Pap test) finds abnormal cervical cell changes that need to be followed up.
- Follow-up of an abnormal Pap test will depend on the degree of abnormal cell changes, past screening history and any other medical conditions. Follow up procedures may include repeat Pap tests, a closer examination of the cervix by colposcopy, or a cervical biopsy.
- Most of the abnormal cervical cell changes found on Pap tests are mild, and usually go away in 2 years without treatment.
- Only a small percentage of women will need treatment and further follow-up.
- Regular screening is the best way to find abnormal cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer. Finding these changes early means simpler and more successful treatment.

For more information, please call the Cervical Cancer Screening Program at 604.877.6200 or visit our website at: www.bccancer.bc.ca/cervicalscreening



BC Cancer Agency
CARE & RESEARCH

CERVICAL CANCER
SCREENING PROGRAM

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The BC Cancer Agency is committed to reducing the incidence of cancer, reducing the mortality from cancer, and improving the quality of life of those living with cancer. It provides a comprehensive cancer control program for the people of B.C. by working with community partners to deliver a range of oncology services, including prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment, research, education, supportive care, rehabilitation and palliative care.

The BC Cancer Foundation is an independent charitable organization that supports research and care at the BC Cancer Agency. You can help support cancer research by donating to the BC Cancer Foundation at 604.877.6040 or toll free 1.888.906.CURE (2873) or visit their website at: www.bccancerfoundation.com



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