

## Pap Test

Answering your questions about HPV results and the Pap test

**A Pap test may be recommended based on your health history  
or if certain types of high-risk HPV are found in your cervix self-screening sample.**

### Who needs a Pap test?



#### **Follow-up of cervix self-screening results**

If cervix self-screening finds certain high-risk types of HPV, a health care provider will do a Pap test to look for any cell changes on your cervix.



#### **Prefer a Pap test instead of cervix self-screening**

Anyone with a cervix, including women and Two-Spirit, transgender and gender-diverse people, between the ages of 25 and 69 and without symptoms should screen regularly for cervical cancer.

You should screen regularly if:

- You've had the HPV vaccine.
- You've ever had any sexual contact with another person of any gender; and/or
- You've been through menopause.



#### **Have a history of pre-cancerous cells**

If you have a previous history of pre-cancerous changes of the cervix, you may need to see a health care provider for a Pap test.



#### **Pregnant or using a pessary**

Visit a health care provider to talk about your cervix screening options.

***People can have a range of feelings and questions when their results show that HPV was found.***

- HPV is very common. Having HPV doesn't mean you have or will ever develop cervical cancer.
- It's important for you to go to all of your follow-up appointments.
- The treatment for abnormal cells on your cervix is simple and effective.
- If cervical cancer is found early, the chance of survival is high.

### What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus that spreads through sexual contact, including intimate touching, oral, vaginal and anal sex. HPV is usually harmless and clears on its own, within about 2 years. But sometimes, certain high-risk HPV types can cause abnormal cell changes on the cervix. If left untreated, these changes could lead to cervical cancer over time.

### How did I get HPV?

If you've had any kind of sexual contact in your life, even with one partner, there's a good chance that you've come into contact with HPV. It can appear soon after exposure or years later, making it hard to know when HPV was passed or by whom.

### Does this mean I have cervical cancer?

No, finding HPV in your sample doesn't mean you have or will develop cancer. It's rare for you to have cervical cancer when a high-risk HPV type is found. But, this does mean you'll need more tests.

## Should I tell my partner(s) I have HPV?

It's your choice whether or not you tell them. HPV is very common and most people who are sexually active will get HPV at some point in their life.

There is no treatment for the HPV infection itself. Most of the time, HPV goes away on its own without any symptoms or complications.

## Should my partner(s) get screened?

Anyone with a cervix and who are between the ages of 25 and 69 should screen regularly for cervical cancer.

If your partner(s) doesn't have a cervix, there is no need to check for HPV as they cannot get cervical cancer.

## How can I prevent HPV?

- ① **HPV vaccine:** getting the vaccine can help prevent the most serious types of HPV infections. Visit [immunizebc.ca/hpv](https://immunizebc.ca/hpv).
- ② **Use condoms:** although condoms don't completely prevent you from getting HPV, they help lower your risk. They also protect against other sexually transmitted infections.
- ③ **Don't smoke:** smoking may hurt the body's ability to fight off HPV and other infections.

## Getting a Pap test

A Pap test is done in a health care provider's office or clinic. An instrument, called a speculum, is gently inserted in your vagina so your cervix can be seen. A sample of cervical cells are taken with a small brush or spatula. It is then checked for signs of abnormal cells and/or HPV. What gets tested depends on your age and health history.

A Pap test only takes a few minutes and shouldn't be painful, but may be uncomfortable. Ask a health care provider to stop at any time if you feel uneasy. Don't hesitate to ask questions during the test.

## Your Results

We will mail results to you and a health care provider. You can also see your results online: [healthgateway.gov.bc.ca](https://healthgateway.gov.bc.ca).

Depending on your result, you may need to repeat your screening when invited, or have a colposcopy (a procedure that looks at the cervix more closely).

## Feeling nervous about a Pap test?

If you are nervous or worried about having a Pap test, make an appointment with a provider to talk about your follow-up test. Ask questions and plan your Pap test together. Find more tips at [screeningbc.ca/cervix](https://screeningbc.ca/cervix).

### Things to consider:

- No screening test is perfect. A Pap test result may say there are abnormal cells when there aren't, or the test may miss abnormal cells that are really there.
- Screening may lead to unnecessary stress, treatment, or have potential long-term impacts on future pregnancy (pre-term birth or low birth weight).

### Contact Us

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