

## What Women Should Know Before They Get a Pap and HPV Test

- Genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus in men and women. It is passed on through genital contact, most often during vaginal and anal sex.
- Most sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never know it because HPV usually has no signs or symptoms.
- There are about 40 types of genital HPV. In most cases, HPV goes away within two years, without causing any health problems. It is thought that the immune system fights off HPV infection naturally.
- But sometimes, HPV does not go away within two years. Certain HPV types can linger on a woman's cervix and cause cell changes.<sup>1</sup> These changes can lead to cervical cancer over time, if left untreated.
- You can prevent cervical cancer by getting regular Pap tests and following up as recommended by your doctor. The Pap test can find cell changes (caused by HPV) on your cervix. That way, cell changes can be treated before they turn into cancer.
- In some cases, your health professional may use a new HPV test with the Pap test. The HPV test can find out if you have the types of HPV that are linked to cervical cancer. This test can help your doctor decide how soon you should be screened again, and what (if any) other tests you need.
- Take charge of your health by getting screened for cervical cancer, making sure you get your test results, and by following up with appointments and medical care if recommended.

If you have questions, please write them down and ask about them during your next doctor's visit. You can also call one of the organizations on the back of this card.

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<sup>1</sup>Other types of HPV can cause genital warts in men and women. These types are different from the types that can cause cervical cancer.

- **If both your Pap and HPV tests are normal**, your chances of developing serious cervical cell changes in the next three years are extremely low.
  - Talk to your health professional about when you should come back for your next cervical cancer screening.
  - But remember, you will still need to see your doctor for regular “well-woman” visits. These visits are a chance to check for other possible health problems and to share any health concerns with your doctor. The well-woman visit is different for each woman, based on age and individual health needs.
  
- If either your Pap or HPV test is abnormal, you will need to come back for more tests. Be sure to come back for all appointments and tests that your doctor recommends.
  - An abnormal test result does not mean that you have cervical cancer. But you may have HPV or abnormal cell changes.
  - Doctors can treat the cell changes that HPV may cause; they do not treat HPV (a virus).
  - Although HPV is very common, cervical cancer is rare. Most women with HPV will not develop cervical cancer, if they follow up as recommended by their doctor.

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-2032-4636; 1-888-232-6348 TTY

Operators can answer your questions in English or Spanish 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**The National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service (CIS)**

1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237); 1-800-332-8615 TTY

Information specialists can answer your questions in English or Spanish from 9 am to 4:30 pm in your time zone

