

Cervical Screening & Health Promotion Program

You can help protect your health by investing 20 minutes a year. Book your regular pap test!

Every week in Ontario approximately 10 women will get cancer of the cervix and approximately 3 women will die from it. 90% of those cancers could have been prevented by regular pap tests, which detect cell changes on the cervix before they become cancer.

What is a Pap test?

The test takes its name from George Papanikolaou who developed a technique of staining cells to distinguish abnormal from normal cells. Since the Pap test was introduced more than 25 years ago, the death rate from cervical cancer has dropped almost 50 percent.

Pap tests are a reliable method used to diagnose cells gathered from the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the uterus (womb) and is located at the top of a woman's vagina. Samples are collected from the cervix using a small brush. Discomfort, if any, is mild. You may have some spotting of blood after the test. This is normal.

The nurse will also take samples from inside the vagina, using swabs. These swabs will be sent to the lab to be tested for vaginal infections.

What else happens at the appointment?

You will be asked a series of simple questions to ensure that we have up to date information in your health chart.

The appointment is designed to allow time for questions. This can be helpful whether it is your first pap test, or as you age and notice changes in your body. Our goal is to provide you with counseling and education on disease prevention and reproductive health.

As appropriate, the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine will be offered. This is a vaccine to prevent HPV and is offered to girls and young women aged 9-26.

Why do I need a Pap Test?

Pap tests detect abnormal cells in your cervix. Abnormal cells may be evidence of

- an infection
- early cells changes that may be pre-cancerous
- cancer cells

Regular pap tests can prevent 90% of cervical cancers through early intervention and detection. Caught early enough, cervical cancer can be treated.

What is HPV?

HPV is a very common virus that causes warts. There are over 100 different types of HPV.

In the case of genital HPV, a sexually transmitted infection, the virus can cause wart-like growths on the cervix, vagina or anus. Often women are not aware they have been exposed to the virus. There is no known cure for HPV infection.

The HPV vaccination for woman can prevent four of the common types of HPV. The best time for vaccination is before becoming sexual active. Hence it is offered through Public Health to Grade 8 girls.

The other important side effect of some types of HPV or any sexually transmitted infection (STI) (like herpes, gonorrhea and Chlamydia) may be the long-term damage to your cells. This damage could make your cells more likely to undergo changes that can lead to cancer.

Who needs a pap test?

All women who are, or who have ever been sexually active, should have a regular pap test, between the approximate ages of 18 to 70 years.

You need regular pap tests even if you:

- are no longer sexually active but have been in the past
- are pregnant
- are in menopause
- have sex with women
- have had a partial hysterectomy (which leaves the cervix intact)
- have had a total hysterectomy because of malignant causes or with a history abnormal paps
- have a compromised immune system (have undergone a transplant, chemotherapy or are HIV positive.)

How often do I need a Pap test?

To begin, you should have a pap test every year until you have had three normal results in a row.

After you've had three normal pap tests, you can then continue to have pap tests every 3 years. However, women who have had abnormal results in the past or have a compromised immune system or have HIV, will need a pap test every year.

If you have a new sexual partner, your health care provider may recommend you have pap tests every year until you have three normal results in a row.

Screening may end

- after the age of 70 years if you have had at least 3 normal tests in the past 10 years
- or if you have had a complete hysterectomy with no history of abnormal testing or cancer
- and you have consulted your primary health care provider

Talk to your health care professional if you have had a hysterectomy and are unsure if you should continue screening.

How do I get an appointment?

Call your doctor's office and

- **Book an appointment with our Cervical Screening & Health Promotion Clinic**

This clinic is operated by Registered Nurses who have received specialized training in performing pap tests and in reproductive health care. The clinic operates out of our four sites: Campbellford, Colborne, Hastings and Warkworth. All female patients from the Trent Hills Family Health Team may access the pap clinic. In addition to daytime appointments, there are some evening appointments available.

- **You may also book an appointment for a pap test with a nurse practitioner or your family doctor.**

Cancer Care Ontario

If you have not had a pap within the last 3 years, you will receive a letter from Cancer Care Ontario to remind you to book an appointment. Our goal is to book your appointment within six weeks of your call.

How should I prepare for the test?

In order to get an accurate test result, prior to the pap test, please

- book your appointment when you do not expect to be menstruating
- do not have sex, douche or use vaginal creams 24 hours before the exam

When will I get the results?

It may take several weeks to get the results back. You will be contacted if your results were not normal.

There are several outcomes from a pap test:

- **Normal or negative** – means the test itself was satisfactory and shows normal cells
- **Abnormal cell change** – some of the cells of your cervix are abnormal
- **Cancer of the cervix** – cell changes of your cervix needs specialized treatment. There are many methods to successfully treat cancer of the cervix.

What if the results are abnormal?

Don't panic! An abnormal pap test does not necessarily mean cancer. It may just mean that there are changes in the cells of your cervix. These cells can be treated before they turn into cancer.

It could mean you may need

- treatment for an infection
- to do another pap test
- to be referred to a specialist
- or to undergo other further testing

Where can I get more information?

Ontario Cervical Screening Program
<https://www.cancercare.on.ca/pcs/screening/>

Public Health Agency of Canada, **Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Prevention and HPV Vaccine: Questions and Answers**,
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/hpv-vph/hpv-vph-vaccine-eng.php