

PAP SMEARS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



What is a pap smear?

A pap smear is a screening test used to look for Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), a virus which is spread by both vaginal and oral sex. Over time, infection with HPV can cause cervical cancer. A pap smear is not the same as a screen for other infections such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, or bacterial vaginosis.

How is a pap smear performed?

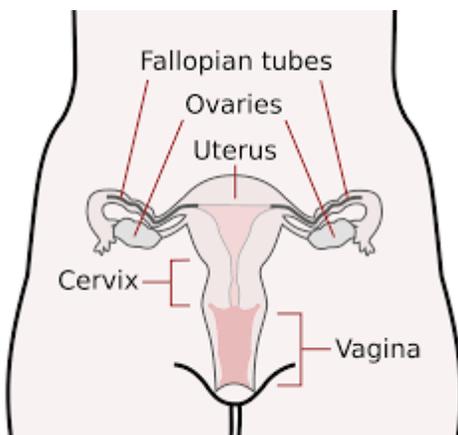
Pap smears are performed by inserting an instrument called a speculum into the vagina, allowing better viewing of the cervix. Two small brushes are then used to swab cells from the internal & external surfaces of the cervix. These brushes are then placed in liquid, and the cells are either looked at under the microscope (cytology) or tested for the presence of HPV DNA.

Why should I get a pap smear?

Though cervical cancer is less common thanks to pap smear screenings & the HPV vaccine, many women still get cervical cancer. While treatable, cervical cancer can require procedures such as hysterectomies that lead to infertility. When combined with HPV DNA testing, pap smears can detect over 9 out of 10 cervical cancers.

I've heard pap smears can be painful. Is this true?

While some women experience discomfort, most do not. The usual feeling is some pressure when the speculum is inserted and opened. There may also be some pinching when the speculum is closed, but with a skilled provider, such pinching is rare.



In the past, I have felt uncomfortable during my pap smear. What are ways I can feel more comfortable & safe?

There are many reasons women may feel uncomfortable during a pap smear. Ask for a chaperone, talk through the procedure before you begin, ask any questions you have, and let the provider know when you are ready. You are in charge!

Pap smears should be done every 3 years for women ages 21-29 & every 5 years for women ages 30-65. New science such as DNA testing have made results more accurate, allowing screening to be done less frequently.

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Even if you have had the HPV vaccine or are not sexually active, pap smears are still recommended.

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You can still have a pap smear done, even if you are on your period or pregnant.

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Remember, you are in charge! Speak up whenever you feel uncomfortable.

## FOR MORE INFO:

Speak with your doctor today about your questions & concerns.

Visit [www.cdc.gov/hpv](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv) for more information about Human Papilloma Virus.