

What happens after colposcopy?

If low-grade abnormalities are found, you will need to be followed closely. To make sure the cells return to normal, you will need to have:

- a repeat Pap test in several months, OR
- another colposcopy procedure

If high-grade abnormalities are found during colposcopy, treatment will be recommended. Most often these abnormalities can be treated successfully so that cancer does not develop.

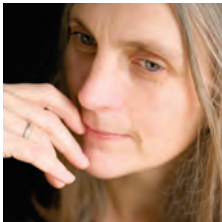
When the abnormal cells have gone away on their own or have been treated, you will need to see your own healthcare provider for regular Pap testing.

- Women with low-grade abnormalities need to have Pap tests every year for 3 years. If all 3 results are normal, they can start having Pap tests every 3 years.
- Women with high-grade abnormalities should keep having a Pap test every year for the rest of their lives.

Remember

Abnormal Pap test results are very common.

- See your healthcare provider so you can be followed closely.
- Following up abnormal Pap test results can most often prevent cervical cancer from developing.



About the Alberta Cervical Cancer Screening Program

The Alberta Cervical Cancer Screening Program (ACCSP) is coordinated by Alberta Health Services in partnership with healthcare providers. The ACCSP mails Pap test results to women. The program also sends reminder letters if women are overdue for their next Pap test. The program operates in some parts of Alberta and will expand throughout the province in the near future. Visit screeningforlife.ca to find out whether the ACCSP sends letters to women in your area.

To get letters from the ACCSP your name and address must be up to date with Alberta Health and Wellness; call 310-0000 (toll free) then dial 780-427-1432.

Screening is one of the best things you can do for yourself to prevent cervical cancer. Breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening saves lives.

For more information, please contact

Cancer Screening Programs

Phone 1-866-727-3926

Fax 1-888-944-3388

screeningforlife.ca

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CERVICAL SCREENING

Making Sense of Abnormal Pap Test Results



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What does an abnormal Pap test mean?

An abnormal Pap test means the cells taken from your cervix look different than normal cells when seen under a microscope.

Usually these changes **do not mean** you have cancer. However, all women with an abnormal result **should** be followed closely as some women will need treatment.

What causes an abnormal result?

Infections caused by bacteria or yeast can cause cell changes that look abnormal. These changes can be treated and do not lead to cervical cancer.

Most often changes in the cells of the cervix are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV):

- About 45 different types of HPV are spread by sexual contact.
- HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection. Over 70% of people will get HPV in their lifetime.
- Most people do not know they have HPV because there are usually no symptoms.
- The body's immune system generally clears the virus within 2 years.
- If the virus does not clear, certain types of HPV can cause cervical cell changes. These cell changes can develop into cervical cancer over many years if not treated.

Most women who have HPV clear the virus and DO NOT develop cervical cancer.

To learn more about HPV, see the brochure *HPV: What you need to know and do*, available at screeningforlife.ca or by calling 1-866-727-3926.

Why is follow-up so important?

Follow-up of abnormal Pap test results is important because it can usually help prevent cervical cancer.

Whenever abnormal cervical cells are found they need to be followed closely. Cell changes often return to normal by themselves. If needed, changes can be treated so that cancer does not develop.

Cervical cancer is rare in Alberta because many women have Pap tests regularly and are followed up by their healthcare providers when they have abnormal results.

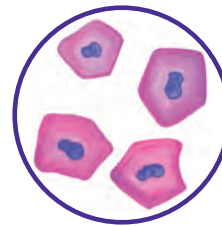
What happens after an abnormal Pap test?

This will depend on the type of cell changes you have.

- **Low-grade changes:** your healthcare provider will repeat your Pap test in 6 to 12 months. Minor cell changes often go away on their own. Cervical cells change slowly. This is why it is important to wait at least 6 months before your next Pap test. You will not need treatment if the cells return to normal.
- **High-grade changes AND low-grade changes that don't go away:** your healthcare provider will likely refer you for a **colposcopy** to examine your cervix more closely. You may also be referred to a gynecologist (a doctor who specializes in women's reproductive systems).



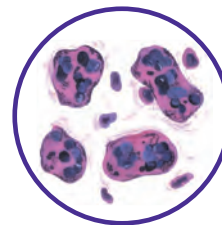
normal cells



low-grade changes



high-grade changes



cancer cells

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is an exam that is similar to a Pap test.

Once the speculum is inserted, a mild vinegar solution is put on your cervix. This solution causes the areas of abnormal cells to turn white. The colposcope is a high-powered microscope used to look closely at any abnormal areas in your cervix. The colposcope does not cause any discomfort because it stays outside your vagina.

You may find it helpful to write down your questions and bring them with you to your appointment.

What if an abnormal area is found?

If an abnormal area is seen during colposcopy, the doctor may remove a tiny sample called a **biopsy**. You may feel a pinch or cramp if a biopsy is done. The biopsy is sent to the laboratory and examined under a microscope. The biopsy result can help determine if you need more treatment.

