

Are there any risks to cervical screening?

- A Pap test can miss abnormal cell changes. This is one reason why it is important to **have Pap tests regularly**. Tell your healthcare provider if you start bleeding between periods or after sexual intercourse.
- Having an abnormal result can be very stressful.
- Pap tests can find changes that might go away on their own. Following-up on these changes may mean extra tests are needed.

Talk to your healthcare provider about these risks.

Remember

- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.
- Have a Pap test at least once every 3 years until you are at least 70.



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

OCTOBER 2009



SCREENING
FOR LIFE.CA

CERVICAL SCREENING

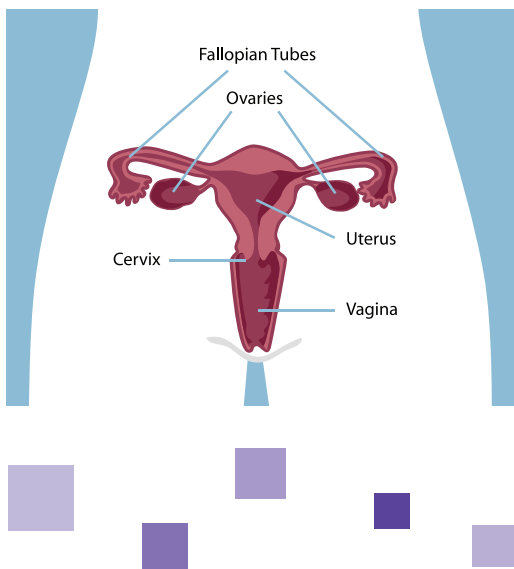
Do I Really Need a Pap Test?



SCREENING
FOR LIFE.CA

What is a Pap test?

A Pap test checks for changes in the cells of your cervix. It is done in a healthcare provider's office, only takes a few minutes, and can save your life. An instrument called a speculum is gently inserted into your vagina so the cervix can be seen. Cells are carefully collected from the cervix and sent to the laboratory to be checked under a microscope. If any cell changes are found, they should be followed closely. If needed, they can be treated so that cancer does not develop.



Should I have a Pap test?

- If you have ever been sexually active, you should have Pap tests regularly starting at age 21, or 3 years after becoming sexually active, whichever is later.
- Being sexually active means having any intimate skin-to-skin contact in the genital area. This includes touching, oral sexual activity, or intercourse with a partner of either sex.
- Pap tests should be a regular part of your health routine until you are 70. The risk of cervical cancer does not decrease with age, so continued regular screening is very important.
- If you have had a hysterectomy, talk to your healthcare provider about whether Pap tests are still needed.

But what if ...

- I feel healthy and I have no symptoms
- I am no longer sexually active
- I have only had one partner
- I am in a same-sex relationship
- I have been through menopause
- I have no family history of cervical cancer

YES	NO
✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	

You still need to...**HAVE PAP TESTS REGULARLY**

How often should I have a Pap test?

Unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise:

- You should have a Pap test once a year for 3 years. If the results of all 3 tests are normal, you can begin having Pap tests once every 3 years.
- For most women 70 years and older, cervical screening can stop if your last 3 Pap tests, done within the past 10 years, were normal.

Where do I go for a Pap test?

- Make an appointment with your healthcare provider.
- If you need a family doctor or want to go to a women's health clinic:
 - call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465)
 - visit informalberta.ca
 - visit cpsa.ab.ca

How do I get ready for a Pap test?

- Try to make the appointment for a day when you will not have your period.
- Don't douche or use contraceptive creams or jellies 24 hours before the test.
- Don't have sexual intercourse 24 hours before the test.



What causes cervical cancer?

- Certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV) cause cervical cancer. HPV is a group of viruses that affect different parts of the body.
- The types of HPV that cause cervical cancer are spread by intimate sexual contact.
- HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) that affects women and men. Over 70% of people will get HPV in their lifetime.
- Most people infected with HPV never have symptoms.
- 90% of HPV infections in women clear up on their own in less than 2 years.
- **While HPV is very common, most women with HPV will NOT develop cervical cancer.**
- Pap tests check for cervical cell changes caused by HPV. Any changes can be followed closely to make sure they clear up. They may need to be treated to prevent cervical cancer.
- In rare cases, if the HPV infection does not go away and changes are not found early, it can lead to cervical cancer after many years.

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.

What can I do to reduce my risk?

- **Have a Pap test regularly.**
- Talk to your healthcare provider about the HPV vaccine.
- Even if you are vaccinated against HPV, get a Pap test regularly. The vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have. Your partner's sexual history is also important.
- Use condoms. Although condoms work well to prevent other STIs, they offer less protection against HPV. HPV can be found on skin that is not covered by condoms.
- Practice abstinence (no intimate skin-to-skin contact in the genital area).
- Don't smoke and limit second-hand smoke exposure. Tobacco use in women with HPV has been linked to a higher risk of cervical cancer.
- Understand that sexual activity at a young age increases your risk of being infected with HPV.