



## January 360 Health & Wellness

### Spotlight on Cervical Cancer

*The Pap test screens for cervical cancer and is one of the most reliable and effective cancer screening tests available.*

Each year, about 12,000 women in the United States get cervical cancer yet it's the easiest gynecologic cancer to prevent. Two screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer or find it early:

- The **Pap test (or Pap smear)** looks for cell changes on the cervix that might become cervical cancer if they are not treated appropriately (referred to as 'pre-cancers').
- The **HPV test** looks for the virus (human papillomavirus) that can cause these cell changes.

Your doctor collects cells and mucus from the cervix and the area around it, which are then sent for testing. Sometimes, an HPV test is done at the same time. (Talk with your doctor, nurse, or other health care professional about whether the HPV test is right for you.)

The Pap test is recommended for all women between 21 and 65 years old. It does not screen for ovarian, uterine, vaginal, or vulvar cancers, so even if you have a Pap test regularly and notice any signs or symptoms that are unusual for you, see a doctor to find out why you're having them. If your test results are normal, your doctor may tell you that you can wait three years until your next test.

### Test Results

It can take as long as three weeks to receive your test results. If your test shows abnormalities, your doctor will contact you for a follow-up. Abnormal results do not always mean pre-cancerous cells.

In most cases, early treatment prevents cervical cancer from progressing, which is why it's important to follow up with your doctor right away and learn more about your test results.

### When to Get Screened

#### Suggested Schedule

- Begin at 21 years old
- Age 21-29: continue 1x per year
- Age 30-65: continue every 3 years
- Age 65+: as your doctor recommends

#### When Not to Screen

- Younger than age 21
- Older than age 65
- No cervix



**Always schedule screenings per your doctor's recommendation**



## Can I get tested when I have my period?

Generally, no. Any time is a good time to get your Pap test, unless you have your period.

## What do I have to do for the test?

Nothing! But there are things you should **not** do the two days prior to testing, including:

- douche (rinse the vagina with water or another fluid)
- use a tampon
- have sex
- use a birth control foam, cream, or jelly
- use a medicine or cream in your vagina

## Resources

Cervical Cancer Guideline Chart: <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/guidelines.pdf>

*Cervical Cancer prevention and treatment courtesy of the CDC ([cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic\\_info/screening.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm))*

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