



# Pap Tests

## **What is a Pap test?**

A Pap test or Pap smear checks for changes in the cells of the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the womb, which opens into the vagina. The test can find cancer cells or cells that could turn into cancer.

## **When should women start getting Pap tests?**

All women should start getting Pap tests about 3 years after they first have vaginal sex. All women should be getting Pap tests by the time they are 21 years old.

## **How is a Pap attest done?**

A medical provider inserts a speculum into the vagina to see the cervix. A sample of cells from inside and outside of the cervix is taken.

## **How to get ready for a Pap test?**

Do not have a Pap test if you are having your period. It can make it harder to find cells that are not normal. Please call 24 hours in advance and reschedule your appointment.

## **How often should women get Pap tests?**

A women should talk with her medical provider to decide how often to have Pap tests. How often a woman should have a Pap test is based on many things, including:

- Her age
- Results of pap tests in the past
- Medical history
- Having HPV (human papillomavirus)
- Smoking.

## **When should women stop getting Pap tests?**

Women can stop getting a Pap test at 65 years old if the results of all Pap test in the last 10 years were normal. Women over 65 years old should discuss with their medical provider if they should continue to have pelvic exams.

## **What about women who have had a hysterectomy?**

Women who have had a partial hysterectomy still need to get Pap test. This surgery takes out the womb (uterus) but NOT the cervix. Women who have had a total hysterectomy may stop getting Pap test. This surgery takes out the womb (uterus) and cervix.