

What is the Ontario Cervical Screening Program?

The aim of the Ontario Cervical Screening Program, a program of Cancer Care Ontario and the Government of Ontario, is to help prevent and reduce deaths from cervical cancer. This program will send letters to Ontario women to invite them for Pap testing, advise them of their test results and remind them when it is time to return for screening. If you do not wish to receive letters from the Ontario Cervical Screening Program, please call 1-866-662-9233.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario has approved the practices and procedures of Cancer Care Ontario's Cancer Screening Registry.

For more information:

- For information about cervical cancer screening, or Ontario's Cervical Cancer Screening Program call 1-866-662-9233.
- For general information about health-related programs and services call Service Ontario at 1-877-234-4343, TTY 1-800-387-5559.
- Find out when it is the right time for you to start screening. Take the Time to Screen Tool at ontario.ca/screenforlife.

Screen for Life
Cancer screening sees what you can't



CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

Find out when it is the right time
for you to start screening.

Visit ontario.ca/screenforlife



What causes cervical cancer?

- Certain types of HPV cause cervical cancer. HPV is a family of viruses commonly found in both men and women.
- HPV is passed from one person to another through intimate sexual contact.
- Most people come into contact with HPV at some point in their lifetime. Usually there are no symptoms and often people do not know that they have an HPV infection. The infection usually goes away naturally within two years.
- An HPV infection causes cell changes in the cervix. For most women, the cells change back to normal when the infection goes away. Sometimes, for reasons that are not well understood, an HPV infection stays in the body for a long time. Over a number of years, this may slowly lead to cancer if the abnormal cells are not found and, if necessary, treated.
- Most women with an HPV infection do **not** develop cervical cancer.

Many women are surprised to learn:

- Cervical cancer is caused by an HPV (human papillomavirus) infection.
- Screening with a Pap test is the only way to find cell changes in your cervix that may lead to cancer.

That's why it's important to have regular Pap tests. Pap tests find early cell changes in the cervix caused by HPV infections that won't go away. Those cell changes don't usually cause any symptoms, but they can turn into cancer if you don't find and treat them.

Remember, cancer screening helps see what you can't.

Pap tests check for cervical cell changes that are caused by an HPV infection. Cervical cancer can be prevented by following these cell changes closely and treating them if necessary.

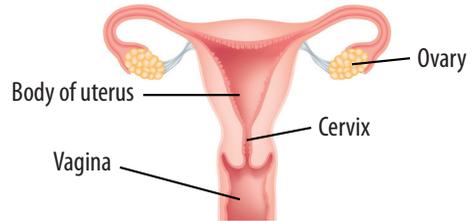


What can I do to reduce my risk of cervical cancer?

- Go for regular Pap tests.
- Go for follow-up testing if your Pap test result is abnormal.
- Consider HPV immunization. The HPV vaccine is available at no charge to all grade 8 girls through Ontario's publicly funded school-based program. It is ideal to have the vaccination before becoming sexually active and possibly exposed to the HPV virus. However, women who are already sexually active can also receive the vaccine. The vaccine prevents most but not all cervical cancers. Therefore, even if you are vaccinated against HPV, you still need regular Pap tests.
- Be aware that the risk of HPV infection starts with sexual activity at an early age. It also increases each time you have a new sexual partner or if your partner has had a number of previous intimate contacts.
- Use a condom. Condoms do not fully protect you from HPV infection, but they may reduce the risk. Condoms are effective protection against other sexually transmitted infections.
- Be tobacco-free and avoid secondhand smoke. Tobacco use can weaken the immune system, which makes it difficult for your body to fight off an infection.
- Eat well; follow Canada's Food Guide.
- Exercise regularly, manage stress and get enough rest to stay healthy.

What is a Pap test?

A Pap test is a simple screening test that can help prevent cervical cancer. A Pap test looks for abnormal cell changes on the cervix. It does not test for other cancers in the reproductive organs or for chlamydia, gonorrhea, or HIV.



A Pap test is done in a health care provider's office. An instrument, called a speculum, is gently inserted into your vagina so your cervix can be seen. Cells are taken from the cervix and are sent to a laboratory to be examined under a microscope.

Why are Pap tests needed?

Although cells on the cervix are always growing and changing, the HPV virus can cause normal cells to become abnormal. Often these abnormal cells return to normal once the HPV virus has cleared, but if they do not, a Pap test looks for these abnormal cells to determine if treatment is necessary. If left untreated for a number of years, abnormal cells can slowly turn into cervical cancer.

Are Pap tests effective?

Yes. But, they are not perfect. They can miss some abnormal cells. Be sure that you are going for regular Pap tests. This decreases the chance of missing important changes. If you have unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge, see your health care provider, even if your last Pap test was normal.



Should I have a Pap test?

- If you have ever had any sexual skin-to-skin contact, you need to have regular Pap tests starting at age 21. This includes intercourse, intimate touching or oral sexual contact.
- Pap tests should be a part of your regular health check-up until you are 70 years old. The risk of getting cervical cancer does not decrease with age.
- Pap tests can stop after the age of 70 if you have had at least three normal tests in the prior 10 years.
- If you have had a hysterectomy, talk to your health care provider to see if you still need a Pap test.

Do I still need a Pap test?

Do I still need a Pap test?	Yes	No
I feel healthy and have no symptoms	✓	
I have never had intimate sexual contact		✓
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	✓	
I am under 21		✓

How often should I have a Pap test?

You should have a Pap test every three years. If you are found to have abnormal cells, your health care provider will advise you of when you need to have another Pap test or if you need to be referred to a specialist.

Where do I go for a Pap test?

- Make an appointment with your health care provider. If you do not have a health care provider, you can register for Health Care Connect at 1-800-445-1822 or ontario.ca/healthcareconnect
- Some Public Health Units and Community Health Centres also provide Pap tests.
- For information on health care services in your community, visit ontario.ca/healthcareoptions

What's the best way to get ready for a Pap test?

- Try to make the appointment for a day when you do not have your period.
- Don't have sex or use tampons, creams or medicines in your vagina for 48 hours before the test.
- If these can't be avoided, still go for your test.

What happens after the Pap test?

Most often, your Pap test result will be normal. If your result is abnormal, it does **not** mean you have cervical cancer. Your health care provider will contact you if you have an abnormal test result to discuss next steps, such as a repeat Pap test in a few months. If needed, you may also have to see a specialist for more tests. The Ontario Cervical Screening Program will send letters to Ontario women to invite them for Pap testing, advise them of their test results and to remind them when it is time to return for screening.