

What is a Colposcopy?

A colposcopy is like a Pap test except that a special magnifying instrument – a colposcope – is used to magnify your cervix for a closer look. The test takes about five to ten minutes. It does not require a hospital stay, freezing or pain medication.

There may be an area on your cervix that the specialist wants to check. If so, they will take a small sample of tissue from your cervix – a cervical biopsy. Most women only feel a slight pinch when the sample is taken.

You will be contacted when the biopsy results are ready. Your doctor will talk to you about the results and if you need treatment to remove the abnormal cells. There are a number of ways this can be done. Your doctor will recommend the treatment that is best for you. Treatment is often simple and highly effective. Most women will have no further problems.

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Version: April 2014



BC Cancer Agency

CARE + RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Abnormal Pap Test



www.screeningbc.ca/cervix

An abnormal Pap result means that cells have been found on your cervix that do not look normal. Abnormal Pap test results are common and do not mean you have cancer.

It is rare for women with an abnormal Pap test result to have cervical cancer. However, when abnormal cells are found they need to be closely followed by a doctor. Often cells return to normal by themselves but in some cases they need treatment to prevent cancer from developing.

You need to discuss your results and the need for further tests or treatment with your doctor. It is important that you attend all follow-up appointments.

What causes an abnormal result?

Infection, inflammation or hormone changes can cause abnormal Pap test results. However, most abnormal results are caused by a common virus called the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is easily spread through any kind of sexual contact. This includes intimate touching, oral, vaginal and anal sex. Almost everyone will get HPV at some point in their lives – often without knowing it. Usually the body's immune system clears the virus by itself within two years.

For some women the HPV does not clear from the body. Over time it can cause changes in the cells on the cervix that you cannot see or feel. These cells can change to cervical cancer if not found and treated early enough.

Treating abnormal cells early can stop cancer from developing.

What happens after an abnormal Pap test?

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

Mild atypical cell changes

Your doctor will repeat your Pap test in 6 months. Mild cell changes usually return to normal by themselves but another Pap test is needed to make sure. Cervical cells change slowly. This is why you are asked to wait 6 months before your next Pap test.

Moderate to severe atypical cell changes

Your doctor will refer you to a specialist for a test that takes a closer look at your cervix – a colposcopy. It is unlikely you have cancer, but moderate/severe cell changes are less likely to return to normal by themselves and usually need treatment.

What you should know

- Abnormal Pap results are common and do not mean you have cancer.
- It is important to attend all follow-up appointments for test or treatment.
- Treatment is simple and highly effective. Most women will have no further problems.
- If found early, cervical cancer is 85% curable.