

What happens after colposcopy?

If low-grade abnormalities are found, you will need to be followed-up closely. To make sure the cells return to normal, your healthcare provider will tell you whether you need to have:

- a repeat Pap test in several months, OR
- another colposcopy procedure

If high-grade abnormalities are found during colposcopy, treatment will be recommended. Most often these abnormalities can be treated successfully so that cancer does not develop. Possible treatments may include:

- **Laser Surgery:** a laser beam destroys abnormal cells
- **LEEP:** a wire loop that removes a piece of tissue using an electric current
- **Cone Biopsy:** a cone-shaped wedge of tissue is removed

Once abnormal cells have been treated or resolve on their own, continue with regular Pap testing.

- Women who have low-grade abnormalities need to have a Pap test every 3 years.
- Women who have had high-grade abnormalities should keep having a Pap test every year for the rest of their lives.

Remember

Abnormal Pap test results are very common.

- See your healthcare provider so you can be followed-up closely.
- Following-up abnormal Pap test results can almost always prevent cervical cancer from developing.

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 cervical screening results to women. The program also sends reminder letters if women are overdue. Visit www.screeningforlife.ca to find out which letters the ACCSP is sending to women in your area.

To get letters from the ACCSP your name and address must be up to date with Alberta Health; call 310-0000 (toll free) then dial 780-427-1432.

Screening is one of the best things you can do to prevent cervical cancer. Breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening saves lives.

For more information please contact

Screening Programs

Phone 1-866-727-3926

Fax 1-888-944-3388

www.screeningforlife.ca

Local contact information



Alberta Cervical Cancer
Screening Program



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Cervical Screening

Making Sense of Abnormal Pap Test Results



SCREENING
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When your Pap test result is abnormal **DON'T PANIC**. Abnormal Pap tests are very common. About 1 in 18 Pap tests in Alberta is abnormal.

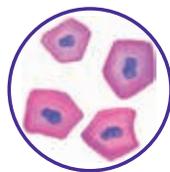
What does an abnormal Pap test mean?

The cells taken from your cervix look different than normal cells when seen under a microscope.

Usually these changes do not mean you have cancer. However, all women with an abnormal result should be followed-up closely as some women will need treatment.



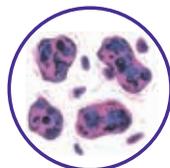
normal cells



low-grade changes



high-grade changes



cancer cells

What causes an abnormal result?

There are different causes of an abnormal result:

- Bacteria or yeast infections can cause cell changes that look abnormal. These changes can be treated and do not lead to cervical cancer.
- Most changes in the cells of the cervix are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV).

Most women who have an abnormal Pap test DO NOT develop cervical cancer.

Why is follow-up so important?

Whenever abnormal cervical cells are found they need to be followed-up closely. Cell changes often return to normal by themselves. If needed, changes can be treated so that cancer does not develop.

Cervical cancer is rare in Alberta because many women have Pap tests regularly and are followed-up by their healthcare providers when they have abnormal results.

What happens after an abnormal Pap test?

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

- **Low-grade (mild) changes:** your healthcare provider will repeat your Pap test in 6 to 12 months. Minor cell changes often go away on their own. Cervical cells change slowly. This is why it is important to wait at least 6 months before your next Pap test. You will not need treatment if the cells return to normal.
- **Low-grade changes that don't go away OR high-grade (moderate/severe) changes:** your healthcare provider will likely refer you for a colposcopy to examine your cervix more closely. You may also be referred to a gynecologist (a doctor who specializes in women's reproductive systems).



To learn more about HPV, see the brochure **HPV: What You Need to Know and Do**, available at www.screeningforlife.ca/downloadable-resources/ or by calling 1-866-727-3926.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a test that uses a high-powered microscope that looks closely at any abnormal areas on your cervix.

- A colposcopy is an exam that is similar to a Pap test.
- A tool called a speculum is gently inserted into your vagina. A mild vinegar solution is then put on your cervix. This solution causes the areas of abnormal cells to turn white.



What if an abnormal area is found?

If an abnormal area is seen during colposcopy, the doctor may do a biopsy by removing a tiny sample of cells from the cervix. You may feel a pinch or cramp if a biopsy is done. The biopsy is sent to the laboratory and examined under a microscope. The biopsy result can help determine if you need more treatment.

