

## Are there any risks to cervical screening?

- A Pap test can miss abnormal cell changes. This is one reason why it is important to **have Pap tests regularly**. By getting Pap tests at least once every 3 years, cell changes can be found early and treated if needed.
- Having an abnormal result can be very stressful.
- Pap tests can find changes that might go away on their own. Following-up on these changes may mean extra tests are needed.

Talk to your healthcare provider about these risks.

To learn more about Pap tests, see the brochure *Making Sense of Abnormal Pap Test Results* available at [www.screeningforlife.ca/downloadable-resources/](http://www.screeningforlife.ca/downloadable-resources/) or by calling 1-866-727-3926

## Remember

- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.
- Have a Pap test at least once every 3 years until you are at least 70.



## 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](http://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](http://www.screeningforlife.ca)

Local contact information



Alberta Cervical Cancer  
Screening Program



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Cervical010

## Cervical Screening

## Do I Really Need a Pap Test?



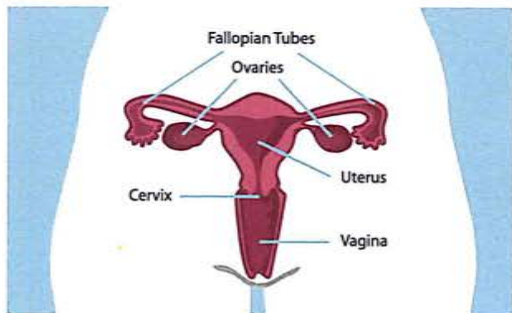
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**90% of cervical cancer can be prevented with regular Pap tests.**

### What is a Pap test?

- A Pap test checks for changes in the cells of your cervix.
- Your healthcare provider will gently insert a tool called a speculum into your vagina.
- Cells are carefully collected from the cervix and sent to the laboratory.
- If any cell changes are found, they should be followed closely. If needed they can be treated so that cancer does not develop.



### Do I need to have a Pap test?

- If you have ever been sexually active, you need to have Pap tests regularly starting at age 25 (or 3 years after becoming sexually active, whichever is later).
- Being sexually active means having any skin-to-skin contact in the genital area (touching, oral sex, or intercourse) with a partner of either sex.
- Pap tests need to be a regular part of your health routine until you are at least 70.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about whether Pap tests are still needed if:
  - you have had a hysterectomy (removal of uterus/womb)
  - you are pregnant and due for a Pap test

### Do I still need to have Pap tests regularly if:

- I feel healthy and I have no symptoms?
- 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?

| YES | NO |
|-----|----|
| ✓   |    |
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### How often do I need to have a Pap test?

Unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise:

- Have a Pap test once every 3 years.
- For most women 70 years and older, Pap tests can stop after 3 normal tests. Women 70 and older who have had regular Pap tests throughout their lifetime are very unlikely to develop cervical cancer.

If you have any symptoms (bleeding between periods or after sexual intercourse) between Pap tests, see your healthcare provider.

### Where do I go for a Pap test?

- Make an appointment with your healthcare provider.
- If you need a doctor or want to go to a women's health clinic:
  - call Health Link Alberta at 8-1-1
  - visit [www.informalberta.ca](http://www.informalberta.ca)
  - visit [www.cpsa.ca](http://www.cpsa.ca)



### How do I get ready for a Pap test?

- Try to make the appointment for a day when you will not have your period.
- Don't douche or use contraceptive creams or jellies 24 hours before the test.
- Don't have sexual intercourse 24 hours before the test.
- Don't use personal lubricants 48 hours before the test.

Your healthcare provider will get your test result 2 to 3 weeks after your test.

### What causes cervical cancer?

- Certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause cervical cell changes, which if left untreated can lead to cervical cancer.
- HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) that affects men and women.

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

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

- **Have a Pap test regularly.**
- Talk to your healthcare provider about the HPV vaccine. Even if you are vaccinated against HPV, get a Pap test regularly.
- Consider practicing safer sex
  - limit the number of sexual partners you have (your partners' sexual history is also important)
  - use condoms (condoms offer some protection against HPV)
  - start sexual activity later in life
- Limit tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke. Women who use tobacco and have HPV have a higher risk of cervical cancer.