

# Understanding the test

Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. The good news is cervical cancer is almost entirely preventable with regular screening.

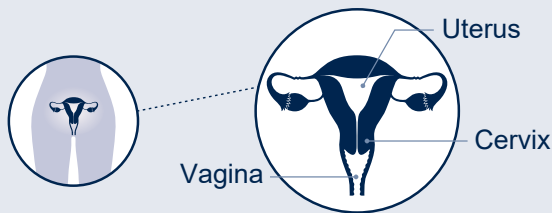
### What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus that spreads through sexual contact. This includes intimate touching, oral, vaginal and anal sex.

Most people will have an HPV infection at some point in their life and never know it. There are usually no symptoms. The majority of HPV infections don't cause any problems and are cleared by your body within 2 years.

But sometimes, certain HPV types don't clear on their own and can cause cells on your cervix to become abnormal. These abnormal cells may become cancer cells over time.

### Where is the cervix?



### Why is cervical cancer screening important?

The cell changes that lead to cervical cancer can happen without you knowing.

#### Screening can help:

- Find out if you're at risk for developing abnormal cells. Finding and treating abnormal cells early can help prevent cancer.
- Find cancer at an early stage when there are more treatment options.

### What is the cervical screening test?

As of **November 2025**, women and people with a cervix aged 50 to 69 will be screened by their healthcare provider with the cervical screening test instead of the Pap test. The cervical screening test looks for high-risk types of HPV.

### What to expect with a cervical screening test

A cervical screening test only takes a few minutes and is done in your healthcare provider's office or at a women's health clinic. Your healthcare provider will collect a sample from you in the same way they did for a Pap test. Your sample will be sent to the lab to test for high-risk types of HPV.

### Who is eligible?

- Women and persons with a cervix
- Aged 50 to 69
- Due for cervical cancer screening
- Have a valid Alberta Health Care number
- Have ever had sexual contact with another person of any gender

After your first cervical screening test, get screened every 5 years, or when your healthcare provider tells you it's time. You may need to get screened every 3 years if you have a weakened immune system. For example, if you're living with HIV/AIDS or have had an organ transplant.

#### You should still get screened even if:

- You've had the HPV vaccine.
- You feel healthy.
- You've been through menopause.
- You have no family history of cervical cancer.
- You've had sexual contact with only 1 person.
- You've had the same sexual partner for a long time.
- You've not had sexual contact in a long time or are no longer sexually active.
- You're in a same-sex relationship.

## Where to get a cervical screening test done

Book an appointment with your healthcare provider (doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse or midwife).

If you don't have a healthcare provider or want to go to a women's health clinic, do any of the following:

- Call Health Link at 8-1-1
- Visit [albertafindadoctor.ca](https://albertafindadoctor.ca)
- Visit [informalberta.ca](https://informalberta.ca)
- Visit [cpsa.ca](https://cpsa.ca)

You can also find a location close to you at: [screeningforlife.ca/where-to-get-screened](https://screeningforlife.ca/where-to-get-screened)

## Getting your results

After you've had your cervical screening test, the sample will be sent to the lab to be tested. If high-risk types of HPV are found in your sample, the lab will perform more tests to look for any abnormal changes in the cells of your cervix.

There are a few different ways you may get your results:

- You may hear from your healthcare provider.
- You can contact your healthcare provider if you haven't heard from them already.
- You can view your test results online if you have a MyChart (formerly MyAHS Connect) account. MyChart is available to all MyHealth Records users. Learn more about viewing results online at [myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords).
  - If you have an abnormal or unsatisfactory result, you may also receive a letter by mail.
  - Normal result letters will not be mailed to Albertans who have a MyChart account. If you do not have a MyChart account, you may receive result letters by mail.
- You may also receive a reminder letter when it's time for your next cervical screening test.

## Things to think about

- Book your cervical screening test appointment when you're not having a period. This includes the 2 days before or after your period.
- If you have bleeding after sex, between periods or after menopause, talk to your healthcare provider first. It's important to look into these symptoms before getting screened. If you have an unusual vaginal discharge or a pelvic infection, wait until after any treatment before you have your cervical screening test done.
- An abnormal result might cause some anxiety. This result doesn't mean you have cancer, but your risk is higher. You'll need more tests to determine the next steps. Most people will clear an HPV infection, and not everyone with an HPV infection will develop cancer.
- As with any other test, there are both benefits and risks. It's important to be aware of them before having any test so that you can make an informed decision. Learn more at [screeningforlife.ca/cervical/get-screened/cervical-screening-test](https://screeningforlife.ca/cervical/get-screened/cervical-screening-test).



**Cervical cancer screening saves lives! Protect your health by getting screened regularly. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have questions about screening.**

## Where can I get more information?

### Primary Care Alberta Screening Programs

1-866-727-3926

Monday to Friday, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

Visit [screeningforlife.ca/cervical](https://screeningforlife.ca/cervical) for more information.

