

## What is HPV testing?

If you are 30 years or older and your Pap test shows cell changes that are hard to interpret, your Pap test sample will be tested for HPV.

If the HPV result is negative, you will not need more tests until your next regular Pap test is due. If the HPV result is positive, your healthcare provider will refer you to a specialist for further testing.

- **HPV testing is not useful for women younger than 30.** This is because HPV is more common among younger women and will usually clear up on its own. In this age group, HPV testing does not help in deciding which women need follow-up care.

To learn more about HPV testing, see the handout ***HPV Testing: Information for Women Having Pap Tests***, available at [www.screeningforlife.ca](http://www.screeningforlife.ca) or by calling 1-866-727-3926.

## Remember

Having Pap tests regularly:

- can find abnormal cell changes early
- helps prevent up to 90% of cervical cancer
- is important even if you are vaccinated against HPV



## 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. The program is in different stages of operation throughout the province. 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. To update your information, call Alberta Health at 310-0000 (toll free) then dial 780-427-1432. Women not wishing to receive letters from the ACCSP should call 1-866-727-3926.

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

For more information, please contact

### Cancer Screening Programs

Tel: 1-866-727-3926

Fax: 1-888-944-3388

Web: [screeningforlife.ca](http://screeningforlife.ca)

JUNE 2016



Alberta Cervical Cancer  
Screening Program



# CERVICAL SCREENING

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)  
What You Need to Know and Do



# SCREENING FOR LIFE.CA

# PAP TEST SCREENING AND HPV VACCINATION CAN PREVENT MOST CERVICAL CANCER

## What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

- HPV is a group of about 100 viruses that affect different parts of the body. Most are harmless.
- About 45 types of HPV are spread easily by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.
- More than 7 out of every 10 sexually active people will get HPV in their lifetime.

## What is the link between HPV and cervical cancer?

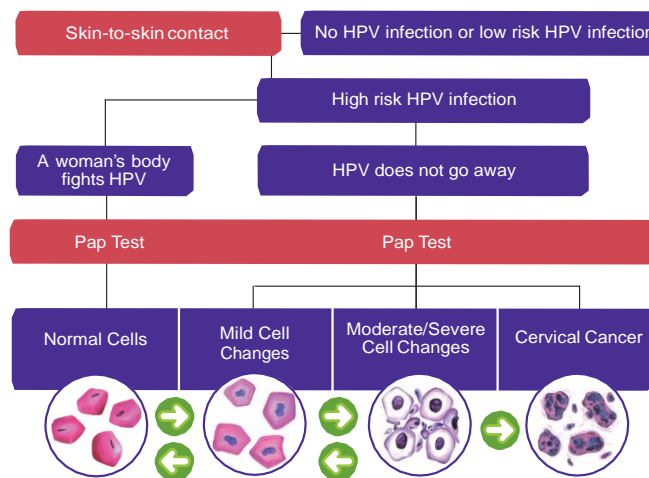
- About 15 types of HPV can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. These types are known as high-risk HPV.
- Most people don't even know when they have high-risk HPV because there are no symptoms. Usually the body fights the infection and the virus clears within two years.
- In some women HPV is longer lasting. These women are at risk of developing more serious cell changes that could lead to cervical cancer. It takes many years for cells to change from normal to abnormal to cervical cancer.
- A regular Pap test is the best way to find abnormal cell changes that don't go away on their own. These cells can be followed closely if found early.
- HPV infections can't be treated. However, if needed, abnormal cells caused by HPV can be treated so that cervical cancer does not develop.

**Regular Pap tests can find abnormal cells caused by HPV infections BEFORE they develop into cancer.**

## How does someone get HPV?

It only takes a moment of skin-to-skin contact in the genital area for HPV to spread. This includes touching, oral sex, or intercourse with a partner of either sex.

Because there are no symptoms, most people do not know they are passing HPV to their partner. HPV is so common that most people get it soon after they become sexually active. Having the virus doesn't mean that you or your partner were unfaithful. The virus can hide in your body for years without any sign that it's there. You or your partner may have been infected long before you became a couple.



## What is the HPV vaccine?

HPV vaccine can prevent two types of HPV that cause about 70% of all cases of cervical cancer. The vaccine works best when given before sexual activity begins, before any exposure to HPV.

A school based HPV immunization program is in place in Alberta and offers the HPV vaccine free of charge to all girls and boys in Grade 5. If you are not covered by the school-based program, there is a fee for the vaccine.

Women may benefit from the HPV vaccine even if they have been sexually active and have been exposed to HPV. The vaccine may offer protection from the types of HPV they haven't been exposed to yet.

If you are thinking about getting the HPV vaccine or have questions:

- talk with your healthcare provider
- visit <http://immunizealberta.ca/i-need-know-more/diseases-covered/hpv-human-papillomavirus>

## With the HPV vaccine, do I still need Pap tests?

Yes, you still need Pap tests regularly even if you are vaccinated against HPV. The HPV vaccine does not protect against all the types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

## What can I do to reduce my risk of getting HPV?

- Talk to your healthcare provider about the HPV vaccine and whether it's right for you.
- Even if you are vaccinated against HPV, get a Pap test regularly.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have because each new partner increases your risk. Knowing your partner's sexual history is also important.
- Condoms lower the risk of HPV. But condoms can only protect areas of skin where the condom comes between each person. The virus may still pass when skin touches skin not covered by the condom.
- Choose not to have sex (i.e. any skin-to-skin contact in the genital area).
- Understand that sexual activity at a young age increases your risk of being infected with HPV.

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

- If you have ever been sexually active you should have Pap tests regularly starting at age 25, or 3 years after becoming sexually active, whichever is later.
- Unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise you should have a Pap test once every 3 years.
- Protect yourself from HPV (see above).
- Don't smoke, and limit second-hand smoke exposure. Tobacco exposure in women with HPV increases the risk of cervical cancer.

