

What happens after colposcopy?

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

- a repeat Pap test, OR
- another colposcopy procedure

If high-grade cell changes are found you will need a colposcopy. Most often these abnormalities can be treated successfully so that cancer does not develop.

When the abnormal cells have gone away on their own or have been treated, you will need to see your own healthcare provider for regular Pap testing.

- Women who have had low-grade cell changes need to have a Pap test every 3 years.
- Women who have had high-grade cell changes 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 closely.
- Following up abnormal Pap test results can prevent most cervical cancer.



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. 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

Screening Programs

Tel: 1-866-727-3926

Fax: 1-888-944-3388

Web: screeningforlife.ca

JUNE 2016
ACB15050



Alberta Cervical Cancer
Screening Program



CERVICAL SCREENING

Making Sense of Abnormal
Pap Test Results



SCREENING FOR LIFE.CA

What does an abnormal Pap test mean?

An abnormal Pap test means 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 closely as some women will need treatment.

What causes an abnormal result?

Infections caused by bacteria or yeast can cause cell changes that look abnormal. These changes can be treated and do not lead to cervical cancer.

Most often changes in the cells of the cervix are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV):

- Over 100 different types of HPV are spread by sexual contact.
- HPV is a common virus that affects women and men. Over 70% of people will get high-risk HPV at some time in their life.
- Some types of HPV can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. These are known as high-risk types.
- Most people do not know when they have HPV because there are usually no symptoms.
- Most often, the body fights off the infection and the virus clears within 2 years
- If the virus does not clear, the cell changes caused by high-risk HPV can develop into cervical cancer over many years if not treated.

Most women who have HPV clear the virus and DO NOT develop cervical cancer.

To learn more about HPV, see the brochure *HPV: What You Need to Know and Do*, and the handout *HPV Testing: Information for Women Having Pap Tests*, available at www.screeningforlife.ca or by calling 1-866-727-3926.

Why is follow-up so important?

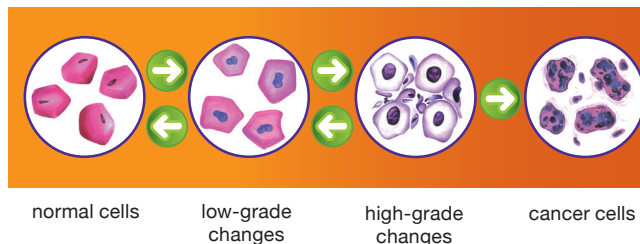
When abnormal cervical cells are found, they need to be followed closely. Cell changes often return to normal by themselves. If needed, changes can be treated so that cancer does not develop.

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. Each year in Alberta about 150 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed and about 40 women with the disease die.

What happens after an abnormal Pap test?

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

- **If you have low-grade 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.
- **If you have low-grade changes that don't go away OR if you have high-grade 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).
- **If you are 30 years or older and the lab sees 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 for a colposcopy.
- **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.



What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is an exam that is similar to a Pap test, but done by a specialist.

Once the speculum is inserted, a mild vinegar solution is put on your cervix. This solution causes areas of abnormal cells to turn white. The colposcope is a high-powered microscope used to look closely at any abnormal areas in your cervix. The colposcope does not cause any discomfort because it stays outside your vagina.

You may find it helpful to write down your questions and bring them with you to your appointment.

What if an abnormal area is found?

If an abnormal area is seen during colposcopy, the doctor may remove a tiny sample called a biopsy. 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 whether you need treatment.

