Cervical screening test

Understanding your results

This resource provides you with information to help you better understand your cervical screening test results.

Your primary healthcare provider will discuss your results and next steps with you. See your primary healthcare provider right away if you notice symptoms, such as abnormal vaginal bleeding, pain or discharge.

What does the cervical screening test look for?

The cervical screening test looks for high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV). After you've had your cervical screening test, the sample will be sent to the lab to be tested. If HPV is found, it's important to understand what this means and why it's important to go for follow-up appointments.

Learning that high-risk HPV was found may cause many feelings and raise a number of questions. Having HPV does not mean you have or will develop cervical cancer.

If certain HPV is found in your sample, the lab will perform more tests to look for any abnormal changes in the cells of your cervix.

What does my result mean?

There are 4 possible results:

- Normal (HPV not detected)
- Abnormal (HPV detected)
- Indeterminate
- Invalid

Result	What it means	What you should do
Normal (HPV not detected)	No high-risk HPV was found. Your risk of cervical cancer is very low.	Continue regular HPV screening: • Every 5 years • Your healthcare provider will advise if you need earlier screening. You may receive a reminder communication through MyHealth Alberta MyChart. Book an appointment with your primary healthcare provider when it's time to get screened again.

Abnormal
(HPV detected)
	High-risk HPV was found.
	This doesn't mean you have cancer, but your risk is higher.
		• If the test finds **HPV type 16 or 18:** Your healthcare provider will refer you to a specialist for a test called a colposcopy.
		• If the test finds **any high-risk HPV**, and you have a weakened immune system (immunocompromised): You'll be referred by your healthcare provider to see a specialist for a test called a colposcopy.
		• If you have a healthy immune system (immunocompetent) and the test finds **other high-risk HPV types**: The lab will do another test using the same sample. This will help determine the next steps.
		  • If further testing shows **high-grade results**: Your healthcare provider will refer you to a specialist for a test called a colposcopy.
		  • If further testing shows **low-grade results**: Book an appointment with your healthcare provider to get screened again in 12 months.
		  • If further testing shows **unsatisfactory results**: Book an appointment with your healthcare provider to get screened again in 3 months.
		Follow your primary healthcare provider's instructions.

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Result	What it means	What you should do
Indeterminate	The lab couldn't tell whether high-risk HPV was present in your sample. This can happen for many reasons.	Further tests will be run on the same sample. • If further testing shows **high-grade results**: Your primary healthcare provider will refer you to a specialist for a test called a colposcopy. • If further testing shows **low-grade results**: Book an appointment with your primary healthcare provider to get screened again in 12 months. • If further testing shows **unsatisfactory results**: Book an appointment with your primary healthcare provider to get screened again in 3 months.

Invalid	The lab couldn't tell whether high-risk HPV was present or absent in your sample.	• **First invalid result:** Book an appointment with your primary healthcare provider to get screened again in 3 months.
		• **Second invalid result:** The lab will do another test using the same sample.
		  • If further testing shows **high-grade results**: Your primary healthcare provider will refer you to a specialist for a test called a colposcopy.
		  • If further testing shows **low-grade results**: Book an appointment with your primary healthcare provider to get screened again in 12 months.
		  • If further testing shows **unsatisfactory results**: Book an appointment with your primary healthcare provider to get screened again in 3 months.

How will I get my results?

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

- You may hear from your primary healthcare provider.
- You can contact your healthcare provider if you haven't heard from them already.
- You can view your test results online through MyHealth Alberta MyChart.
  - If you have an abnormal or unsatisfactory result, you will also receive notice from the Screening Program. This does not mean you have cancer, this means it will be important to do further testing and follow-up with appointments.

You may also receive a reminder notice when it's time for your next cervical screening test.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure that looks for any abnormal changes on your cervix and vagina. A specialist (colposcopist) will use a magnifying tool called a colposcope. A colposcope allows the specialist to get a close-up look at your cervix. The test takes around 10 minutes, and you can go home right after it's done.

It's important to let the specialist or the nurse know if you're pregnant or think you might be pregnant. You can still have a colposcopy when you're pregnant, but they need to know.

The colposcopist will let you know the next steps and if any treatment is needed. For more information on colposcopy, visit screeningforlife.ca/cervical/results-and-next-steps/#further_testing.

Where can I learn more?

For more information on cervical cancer, visit screeningforlife.ca/cervical/cervical-cancer.

For more information on cervical screening test visit: screeningforlife.ca/cervical/get-screened/cervical-screening-test.

For more information on colposcopy, visit screeningforlife.ca/cervical/results-and-next-steps/#further_testing.

Contact us:

Primary Care Alberta Screening Programs
1-866-727-3926
Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Visit screeningforlife.ca/cervical for more information.

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