

Pap tests: the plain facts



MONASH University
Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences



PapScreen
Victoria



Cancer
Council
Victoria

Pap tests: the plain facts

This booklet is to help you understand more about having a Pap test. A Pap test is to see if your cervix is healthy. If some of the words or pictures are hard to understand be sure to ask for help.

You could ask:

- the person who gave you this booklet
- your doctor
- a nurse

and they will read the booklet with you.

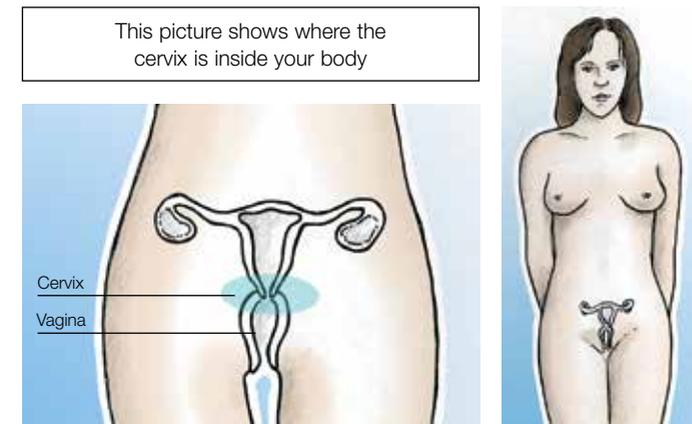


Who should have a Pap test?

Only women need to have a Pap test. Any woman who has ever been sexually active should have a Pap test. Even if you have been sexually active with a woman you need to have a Pap test. Sexually active means having sex or sexual touching on your vagina with another person.

What is a Pap test?

A Pap test checks to see if a woman's cervix is healthy. A cervix is inside a woman's body at the top of the vagina.

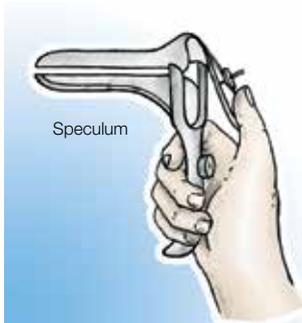


A Pap test is done by a doctor or a nurse. They look inside your vagina to see if your cervix is healthy.

Why should you have a Pap test?

Sometimes there are changes in a woman's cervix. Usually these changes are OK and can easily be treated by the doctor. Sometimes these changes can be more serious, like cancer. This sort of cancer is called cervical cancer. If the changes are found early they can be fixed or treated.

What happens when you have a Pap test?



When you book an appointment, tell the clinic you want a Pap test and if you have any special needs. Booking a double appointment is a good idea.

To see inside your vagina the doctor or nurse needs to use a speculum.

This will hold the sides of your vagina open.

You will be asked to lie on your back or side with your underpants off.

The doctor or nurse will ask you to bend your knees and move your legs apart.

This may feel strange and be a little embarrassing but it is the only way to look inside your vagina.



The doctor or nurse will turn on a bright light at the end of the table and look between your legs.

They will touch your vagina on the outside and gently push the speculum inside.

While the speculum is in the vagina, the doctor or nurse will do some simple tests. This will only take a few minutes.

The tests will not hurt you. If you are very nervous your vaginal muscles tighten so sometimes the speculum may feel uncomfortable. If this happens take a deep breath and try to relax.

When the tests are done the doctor or nurse will take the speculum out of your vagina.

You can now get dressed.

Test results

The doctor or nurse will send the Pap test away and in a few days they will receive your results. The results will tell you if your cervix is healthy. The best way to find out your results is to contact your doctor or nurse.

Things to know

You can choose which doctor or nurse you want to do the Pap test.

If you have periods, it's best to have a Pap test in between your last one and the next one.

It's OK to have someone with you when you have your Pap test done.

You can ask questions if you are unsure or confused about the Pap test.

You can ask the doctor or nurse to stop at any time.

After your first Pap test you will be sent a reminder letter when your next one is due. This is usually every two years.

The cervical cancer vaccine

There is an injection called a vaccine you can have which helps to stop you getting some kinds of cancer.

You get three injections or needles in your arm, one at a time over six months.

It is best to have the vaccine when you are 12 or 13 years old. At this time it is free.

Ask your doctor if getting the vaccine is a good idea.

Other places to get help

Cancer Council Victoria

13 11 20

www.cancervic.org.au

PapScreen Victoria

www.papscreen.org.au

Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria

(03) 9902 4467

www.cddh.monash.org

Family Planning Victoria

(03) 9257 0121

www.fpv.org.au

Royal Women's Hospital

(03) 8345 3032

www.thewomens.org.au

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