



FACT SHEET

Pap Smears – Your Questions Answered

My next Pap Smear is:

abortion

contraception

STI check ups

vasectomy

What is a Pap smear?

A Pap smear checks for changes in the cells of the cervix (neck of the womb) at the top of the vagina. It is a screening test to find any early warning signs that cancer might develop in the future. If abnormal changes are found at screening, further tests may be done to see if treatment is needed.

What is the procedure like?

A Pap smear is a quick and simple test in which a number of cells are collected from your cervix and sent off to a laboratory where they are tested for changes.

The Marie Stopes International doctor or specialist nurse will gently insert an instrument called a speculum into your vagina which allows them to view your cervix. They then use a brush and/or a spatula to take a sample from your cervix. This also picks up cells from inside the opening of the cervix, which are then tested.

The test itself only takes a few minutes and shouldn't be painful. Some women find it momentarily uncomfortable, but it is extremely quick. Make sure you try to relax as much as possible and, if you do feel discomfort, tell the doctor or nurse immediately.

Why is having one important?

A Pap smear looks for changes in the cells of your cervix. Changes happen very slowly but can lead to serious problems like cervical cancer. If abnormal cells are noticed they can be closely observed and/or treated to prevent cancer developing. Having a Pap smear every two years can prevent the most common form of cervical cancer in up to 90% of cases.

Who is at risk of cervical cancer?

All women with a cervix who have ever had sex are at risk of cervical cancer.

But what if I don't have any symptoms?

A Pap smear is for women who don't have any symptoms. It helps detect changes before they develop into cancer.

In the early stages of cervical cancer, there are usually no symptoms at all. You can look and feel perfectly healthy, and still have cell changes in your cervix. Having a Pap smear is the only way to be sure.

Should I have a Pap smear?

If you are sexually active you should have regular Pap smears - even if you are no longer having sex. This includes male to female, and female to female sex.

1800 003 707

www.mariestopes.com.au

When can I stop having Pap smears?

You should make regular screening part of your life – a Pap smear every two years is your best protection against cervical cancer.

At age 70 your doctor may advise that it is safe to stop having Pap smears if you have had two normal Pap smears within the last five years.

What causes cervical cancer?

The cause of almost all cervical cancers is through long term infection with certain types of a virus.

The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is a common viral infection which can be passed on during sex and sometimes causes an abnormal smear test result. Almost all abnormal Pap smear results are caused by HPV.

There are many different types of HPV, some of which have been linked to cervical cancer.

Anyone who has ever had sex can have HPV. It is such a common virus that four out of five people will have had HPV at some time in their lives. In most cases, it clears up by itself in one to two years. In rare cases, if the virus persists and is left undetected, it can lead to cervical cancer.

A Pap smear every two years can detect any abnormal cell changes caused by HPV, which can then be monitored and/or treated to prevent cancer.

What if my Pap smear results are irregular?

First of all, don't panic. Any change in the cells of your cervix usually happen very slowly. In addition, it is important to remember that almost all abnormal Pap smear results are not due to cancer.

An abnormal Pap smear result means that some of the cells of the cervix look different from the normal cells. Your doctor or nurse will explain exactly what type of abnormality has been detected or is suspected on your Pap smear.

If your results show cell changes, we may recommend that you have another smear test after a period of time, or that you make an appointment for a colposcopy.

What is a colposcopy?

This is similar to having a Pap smear. A specialist gynaecologist will look at your cervix using a magnifying instrument called a colposcope. If necessary, a tiny sample of tissue will be taken to be tested in more detail.

Depending on the colposcopy result, the gynaecologist will discuss the next step with you, which may take the form of further screening and observation, or active treatment. Treatment is usually very successful.

**DON'T FORGET YOUR REGULAR BREAST CHECKS
AND BE SURE TO HAVE A PAP SMEAR EVERY TWO YEARS**