

ABNORMAL PAP TESTS

What is a pap test?

A Pap test checks for abnormal cells of the cervix. Abnormal cells have the possibility of turning into a cancer. An abnormal result may require additional testing and follow up to avoid the cells becoming cancerous.

What causes an abnormal pap test?

The main cause of an abnormal Pap test is caused by a virus called human papillomavirus or HPV. There are many types of HPV, some of which have been linked to cancer of the cervix, vulva, and vagina. Other types can cause genital warts.

How do you get HPV?

HPV is a common infection that is passed through sexual contact. There is a test that can be done at the time of the Pap, which is able to determine which type of virus may be present.

What if the Pap shows abnormal cells?

The treatment and follow up depends on your age and the grade of abnormality. Usually a woman's immune system clears the virus and it goes away without treatment. In women who do not clear the virus, further testing is needed. The grading of the pap is determined by the changes in the cells. Depending on the result, some women have the Pap repeated, to see if the virus is cleared. In other women who have not cleared the virus, the Pap test may need to be repeated or a colposcopy may be recommended.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure when the cervix is viewed with a magnifying device. If abnormal cells are seen, a biopsy may be done. The biopsy means a sample of the abnormal cells are taken and tested in the laboratory. If the biopsy looks normal, it is recommended a Pap be repeated in 3 to 6 months. If there are abnormal cells, there are various procedures that can be done to prevent the abnormal cells from turning into a cancer.

What are the procedures that can be done to treat HPV?

- Loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP) - a thin wire loop that carries an electrical current and is used to remove the abnormal area of the cervix. The procedure is performed in a doctor's office and is done with a local anesthetic.
- Freezing – also called cryotherapy, freezes the abnormal cells which then later sheds
- Laser treatment – a beam of light destroys the abnormal tissue

What about follow up after an abnormal Pap?

It is important that once a woman has had an abnormal Pap test, she gets a Pap test on a regular basis.