HPV and Pap Tests

What is the human papillomavirus (HPV)?

- HPV is a virus spread from one person to another through close skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity.
- HPVs are the major cause of cervical cancer.

What is an HPV test?

- An HPV test checks your cervix for the virus that can cause abnormal cells and cervical cancer.
- The HPV test can be done at the same time as a Pap test from the same swab, or an HPV test can be done alone without a Pap test.

What is a Pap test?

- A Pap test checks the cells of the cervix (the opening of the uterus) for changes that could lead to cancer.
- During a pelvic exam, a health care provider inserts a special tool (speculum) into the vagina and collects some cells from the cervix with a swab or brush.

Why is a Pap test and HPV test important?

- Regular Pap tests and/or HPV tests and treatment, when needed, can prevent most cancers of the cervix.
- Women under the age of 30 do not need an HPV test unless the Pap test result is abnormal.
- Women who have cancer of the cervix may not have any symptoms.
- If cancer or precancer develops, it can be found early and treated.

When should I have my first Pap test?

- Women should start having Pap tests at age 21.

How often should I get a Pap test and HPV test?

- Women ages 21 to 29 should get a Pap test every three years.
- Women ages 30 to 65 should get a Pap test and HPV test every five years, or an HPV test only every five years, or a Pap test only every three years.
- Talk to your health care provider about when to begin cervical cancer screenings and how often is right for you.

How can I reduce my risk of cervical cancer?

- Get regular cervical cancer screenings.
- Get follow-up procedures if you had an abnormal Pap test or HPV test.
- Check to see if you have had the HPV vaccine. The HPV vaccines are available for males and females ages 9 to 26.
- Stop smoking. For help quitting, contact NDQuits at 1-800-784-8669.
- The surest way to avoid getting HPV is by refraining from sexual activity.
- If you do have sex, limit the number of your sexual partners, and always use a condom.

What do I do if I cannot afford to pay for a Pap test or an HPV test?

Women's Way may provide a way to pay for a Pap test or an HPV test. Call 1-800-449-6636 or 701-328-3398 or visit health.nd.gov/womens-way to see if you are eligible.

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WOMEN'S WAY
A Breast & Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program