



# 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 regular 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. You do not need an HPV test unless you have an abnormal Pap test result.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Women older than 65 should ask their health care provider when to stop having Pap tests.

## How can I reduce my risk of cervical cancer?

- ◆ Get regular cervical cancer screenings.
- ◆ Get any follow-up procedures that are recommended by your health care provider if you had an abnormal Pap test or HPV test.
- ◆ Stop smoking. For help quitting, contact NDQuits at 1.800.QUIT.NOW or go to [www.ndhealth.gov/ndquits](http://www.ndhealth.gov/ndquits).
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ HPV vaccines are available for males and females ages 9 to 26.
- ◆ Women who have received the HPV vaccine still need to get regular cervical cancer screenings.

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

- ◆ *Women's Way* may provide a way to pay for Pap tests and HPV tests. Call 1-800-449-6636 or 328-2367 or visit [www.ndhealth.gov/womensway](http://www.ndhealth.gov/womensway) to see if you are eligible.

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