

Following Up On Abnormal Pap Test Results

What does an “abnormal Pap test” mean?

When a Pap test result is not normal (abnormal) it means that cell changes were found on your cervix. Usually this does not mean you have cervical cancer. It is important to follow up with your healthcare provider right away to learn more about your test results and receive any more tests or treatment that may be needed.

What causes cell changes on the cervix?

Changes on your cervix are likely caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Depending on your age or Pap test results, your healthcare provider may also test your cervix for HPV. Most of the time, minor changes on your cervix due to HPV go back to normal on their own. But more serious changes can turn into cancer if they are not treated. Finding and treating cell changes on the cervix can prevent cervical cancer.

What will happen if my Pap test result is abnormal?

Some abnormal Pap test results mean you will need more tests right away, while others do not. Your healthcare provider will do what’s right for you based on your Pap test results. Your healthcare provider may:

- Ask you to come back in one or three years for another Pap test to see if a minor abnormality has gone away on its own. This is called “watchful waiting.” Be sure to go back when your healthcare provider wants to see you again.

- Schedule you for another test right away to take a closer look at your cervix. Your healthcare provider may do this test, or may send you to a specialist. This test is done using a special lens that makes your cervix look bigger (called a colposcopy). Depending on how things look, the healthcare provider or specialist may take a small sample of your cervix (called a biopsy) to study it more carefully.

If I have more testing done, what will happen next?

- If results show that you don’t need any treatment, your healthcare provider or specialist will let you know when you should have your next Pap test.
- If results show you need treatment for abnormal cells, your healthcare provider or specialist will treat you. This involves destroying or taking out the abnormal cells. These treatments might be uncomfortable, but they can usually be done during one visit. After treatment, you may need to be followed more often with Pap tests to make sure the abnormalities are gone.



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