



Pap Test & HPV

What Is a Pap test?

A Pap test is a simple, painless procedure that is the primary screening tool for cervical cancer. It looks for changes or abnormalities in cervical cells, which may be an indication of cervical cancer. The early stages of cervical cancer usually have no symptoms and can only be detected through a Pap test. During a Pap test, your doctor uses a small brush to collect a sample of cells from your cervix and sends this specimen to the cytology lab. If abnormal cells are found, they can be removed or treated, decreasing the risk of cervical cancer. It is important to note that a Pap test does not test for sexually transmitted infections (STI's). If you would like an STI test, you can ask your healthcare provider to perform one at the same time, via a blood sample or a urine test.

Who Should Get a Pap Test?

If you have or had a cervix or if you have ever had any sexual contact with another person, and are 21 years or older, you should get a Pap test. This includes oral, anal, and vaginal sex, as well as touching, fisting, fingering, and sharing sex toys. A Pap test is critical in maintaining your health, regardless of your gender identity or sexual orientation. You have a right to get a Pap test if you have or had a cervix and are sexually active, no matter what! Cervical cancer has the potential to affect *all sexually active individuals with a cervix*, regardless of who you have sex with. If you are a trans man or a trans woman, please see the pamphlets that we have created to recognize your specific needs. Ask one of our staff or volunteers for assistance in locating these pamphlets.

Why Do I Need to Get a Pap Test?

A Pap test is the only way to find out if you have cervical cancer, or abnormal, pre-cancerous cells that may lead to the development of this cancer. There is a greater likelihood for successful treatment and recovery if discovered early. It generally takes between ten and twenty years for cervical cancer to develop fully and usually does not show any symptoms at all until a very advanced stage; by getting yourself checked regularly, you can prevent the cancer before it has the chance to develop. Keep in mind that cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in individuals with a cervix in Canada, and NL currently has one of the highest rates of this cancer in the entire country. In order to protect yourself, please be proactive with your health and book an appointment for a Pap test today.

When Should I Start Getting a Pap?

Normally, Pap testing should start at the age of 21 (if sexually active) and continue annually until you have 3 negative results in a row. If this occurs, your doctor may decide to spread out to once every 3 years. You should have a Pap test until the age of 70 years old, unless otherwise advised by your doctor.

What Is HPV?

Precancerous changes or abnormalities in cervical cells are most often caused by the Human Papillomavirus Virus (HPV). There are more than 100 different types of HPV, and approximately 40 of which may affect the anal/genital areas. HPV is passed through any sexual activity that involves the genital area. In addition, it is possible for an infant to be exposed to the virus during birth. Symptoms occur within 1-8 months of exposure to the virus and can include warts that grow on the anal/genital areas, and in the mouth or throat of a person who has had oral sex with an infected person.

Why Should I Be Concerned with HPV?

HPV is one of the major causes of cervical cancer and it has the potential to infect all sexually active individuals. It is one of the most common STI's, infecting up to 75% of all sexually active individuals.

HPV often does not cause any symptoms, so you may contract the virus and spread it without even realizing that you have it. Even if it has been a few years since your last sexual activity, the virus can still be present in your body. Transmission of HPV usually occurs during an outbreak of symptoms but can also occur even if symptoms are not present.

What Happens If Abnormal Cells Are Found?

Abnormal cells do not always indicate cervical cancer. Cell dysplasia (abnormality) can occur for several reasons, including other infections, hormones, pregnancy, or even the normal maturing of your body. If abnormal cells are detected in your Pap test, your doctor may suggest another procedure called a colposcopy, in which a special microscope will be used to analyze your cells more closely. If necessary, the doctor may take a biopsy (tissue sample) from the cervix for further examination.

Will My HPV Ever Go Away?

The immune system is generally able to fight off an HPV infection, meaning that the virus may pass through the body naturally and go away by itself, with or without any sort of medical intervention. In 90% of cases, low-risk types of HPV work their way through the body without any symptoms within 18 months. If symptoms do occur, they are easily treatable, either by a medical procedure (burning or freezing the warts off) or by topical cream. On average, the treatment of cervical, anal, and genital warts takes approximately 8 months. Even when symptoms disappear, you may be infected with HPV again and may experience recurrences of symptoms in the future. Women who are pregnant, or individuals with HIV, AIDS, and different types of cancer, may experience recurring symptoms due to a weakened immune system. Please note that there is a vaccine to protect yourself against HPV. Speak with your health professional for more information.

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am – 4:30pm
Tuesday: 9am – 4:430pm
Wednesday: 9am – 4:30pm
Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm
Friday: 9am – 4:30pm

Phone:

579-1009
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