



# What Every Woman Should Know About HPV

Protect Yourself Against Cervical Cancer

For more information, visit  
[www.theHPVtest.com](http://www.theHPVtest.com)



## What is HPV?

- HPV stands for “human papillomavirus” (pronounced “pap-ah-LO-mah” virus).
- HPV is a very common virus. In fact, it’s estimated that 8 out of every 10 women get HPV by the age of 50.
- For most women, HPV is not a problem. They are able to fight off the infection before it causes any problems. For some, however, the infection persists.
- Men also can get HPV. However, it is rare for HPV to cause serious problems in men.

## How is HPV linked to cervical cancer?

- Certain “high-risk” types of HPV are the cause of cervical cancer.
- When a woman is not able to fight off an infection with a high-risk type of HPV, abnormal cells may form on the cervix. If they are not detected and treated early, these abnormal cells can develop into cervical cancer.

## Can HPV cause other health problems?

- “Low-risk” types of HPV can sometimes cause genital warts. These can be treated.

## How do you get HPV?

- HPV is spread through intimate (genital) skin-to-skin contact, usually during sexual intercourse.
- Your likelihood of getting HPV increases if you have more than one sexual partner, but you can get the virus from just one person.
- Once you have the virus, it may not cause any problems. It may simply go away later. However, it also can “hide” in your cervical cells undetected for months or years before it becomes active and causes abnormal cells to form.



## How do you know if you have HPV?

- High-risk HPV does not produce any symptoms. You can have HPV and not know it.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a high-risk HPV test for women that can be done along with a Pap. The Digene® HPV Test determines whether you have one or more of 13 types of potentially cancer-causing types of the virus. Although HPV itself cannot be treated, knowing you have HPV tells your doctor or nurse to monitor you more closely.
- There currently is no FDA-approved HPV test for men.



## How can getting the right tests prevent cervical cancer?

There are two tests that can protect you from cervical cancer: a Pap and an HPV test. For both tests, a doctor or nurse collects a sample of your cervical cells during your gynecologic exam.

### The Pap test...

- The sample of cervical cells is sent to a lab, where it is examined under a microscope for signs of abnormal changes caused by HPV.
- If the cells look abnormal, another exam called a colposcopy is usually done to determine if any of these cells are diseased. In a colposcopy, the doctor or nurse looks more closely at your cervix using a lighted magnifying device. At the same time, a biopsy is often taken – in which a sample of tissue is removed for analysis in a laboratory. If diseased cells are diagnosed early, they can be removed before cancer develops.
- However, the Pap test is not foolproof, since it depends on the quality of the cell sample and the skill level of the person who examines it. In fact, research shows that a Pap fails to find abnormal cells that need treatment 15 to 35 percent of the time. In addition, cells may appear abnormal when they are not.

### The HPV test...

- The HPV test also is done in the lab on a sample of cervical cells. In fact, the HPV test can usually be done on the same sample collected for the Pap.
- The HPV test uses advanced, molecular technology to detect high-risk types of HPV. The Digene HPV Test is the only HPV test approved by the FDA. One of the advantages of a molecular test is that the result does not depend on the skill of the person examining the cells.
- Knowing whether you have HPV shows if you are at risk for cervical cancer and need additional exams — or not.



## How do you know which test you should get, and when?

### Women younger than 30...

- All women should begin getting a Pap test three years after first sexual intercourse or at the age of 21 – whichever comes first.
- Routine HPV testing isn't necessary yet, because infections in younger women usually don't stay active for very long.
- However, medical experts recommend that women of any age have an HPV test when their Pap results are unclear — in other words, when the Pap isn't clearly abnormal, but not clearly normal either. (Your doctor or nurse may describe this kind of Pap as "ASC-US" – atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance.)

### Women 30 and over...

- This is the age group in which cervical cancer most often develops, because HPV infections in these women are more likely to be long-lasting. HPV infections can persist for many months or even years before they cause problems.
- That's why medical organizations now suggest that every woman age 30 or older get the HPV test along with her Pap.
- If your Pap is normal but you have high-risk HPV, it's a warning that you may be at risk of developing cervical cancer. Medical experts recommend that if re-testing six months to a year later shows the HPV infection is still active, a colposcopy exam (perhaps with a biopsy) should be done to check for abnormal cells that need to be removed.
- When the Pap and HPV tests are done together on a regular basis, cervical cancer can nearly always be prevented.



### Can the new HPV vaccine prevent infection?

- The first HPV vaccine was approved by the FDA in June 2006 for girls and young women age 9-26.
- The vaccine protects against the two most common types of HPV that cause 70 percent of cervical cancers. However, there are more than 10 other types of high-risk HPV that the vaccine does not protect against. The Digene HPV Test detects 13 high-risk types of HPV, responsible for nearly 100 percent of cervical cancers.
- The vaccine is most effective for females who have not yet been exposed to the targeted types of HPV through sexual contact. The vaccine is not a cure for existing infections.
- Thus, women should be screened regularly with the Pap and (if 30 or older) the HPV test, whether or not they are vaccinated. Ask your doctor or nurse about the tests and the schedule that are best for you.

## Will insurance pay for the HPV test?

- Nearly all insurance plans pay for the HPV test — both for follow-up evaluation when your Pap result is unclear and (for women 30 and over) for routine screening.
- Digene offers a hotline that can help you determine if your health plan covers the HPV test. Call 1-866-895-1HPV (1-866-895-1478).  
Please have your insurance company's name and group number available when calling.

## Protect Yourself Against Cervical Cancer! Get Screened Regularly.

For more information, visit [www.theHPVtest.com](http://www.theHPVtest.com). Make sure you get a regular Pap and, if you are 30 or over (or if your Pap result is unclear), ask your healthcare provider for the HPV test. It's one extra test – but a lot more peace of mind.



"I have been practicing for more than 20 years and always welcome it when my patients are informed about their own healthcare and ask questions. Every woman should become educated about HPV so that she understands what it means to her and what tests she needs to protect herself. Healthcare professionals should discuss HPV with their women patients, and explain how both the Pap and HPV tests can help. But if they don't, women should be prepared to act on what they have learned and ask questions."

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