

# HPV, cervical cancer, and you

## The *digene* HPV Test

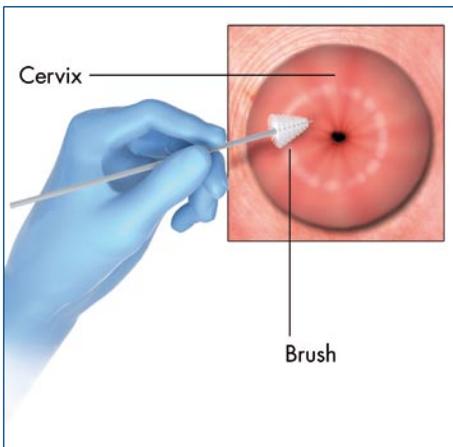


### A guide to understanding your annual exam

- Understanding your annual exam
- Top 3 tips for preventing cervical cancer
- How can I protect myself from HPV and cervical cancer?
- Links: Helpful Web resources on cervical cancer prevention
- Top 5 HPV and cervical cancer myths

Visit [www.thehpvtest.com](http://www.thehpvtest.com) to learn more. Download or link to this document at [www.thehpvtest.com/resource-center](http://www.thehpvtest.com/resource-center).



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## Understanding your annual exam

What really goes on “down there” during the pelvic exam at your annual gynecologic visit? While most of us are counting down the seconds until it’s over, your doctor is performing important, and potentially life-saving exams.

To check for abnormal cell growth, the doctor performs a Pap test to collect cell samples from your cervix (B). The cervix sits at the top end of your vagina, connecting the vagina (A) with the uterus, and is shaped much like a bagel.

During a Pap, the doctor uses a small brush and collects cells inside the cervix.

Next, your doctor will use a spatula-shaped tool to scrape cells from the outside of the cervix. Both samples are viewed under a microscope to check for abnormal growth.

The good news is that with the same cell sample collected during your Pap test, doctors can also check for the virus that is the primary cause of cervical cancer, the human papillomavirus, or HPV. When an HPV test is run, the cell sample is sent to a lab where it is analyzed for the presence of high-risk types of HPV that are associated with cervical cancer. If high-risk HPV is found, your doctor can then put appropriate monitoring and follow-up in place to make sure cervical disease or cervical cancer never have the chance to develop! And if both test results come back normal, you may not need to repeat them for up to three years (be sure to see your doctor each year for your annual check-ups).

## Top 3 tips for preventing cervical cancer

With the right tools, cervical cancer in women can almost always be prevented. Take control of your health!

Here are some general prevention guidelines to keep in mind:

- Ages 9–26:** Consider an HPV vaccine.
- Ages 21 and older:** Get a regular Pap test to look for abnormal or pre-cancerous cells on the cervix.
- Ages 30 and older:** Request an HPV test together with your Pap test to look for the virus that causes cervical cancer, so that the HPV virus can be detected and monitored before cervical disease or cancer can ever develop. Most insurance plans cover both tests.

Visit [www.thehpvtest.com](http://www.thehpvtest.com) to learn more.

## How can I protect myself from HPV and cervical cancer?

While you're learning about the HPV vaccine for your daughter...

...Learn about HPV testing to protect yourself from cervical cancer.

HPV vaccines are for girls and young women ages 9–26 to help protect against the two types of HPV that are most commonly associated with cervical cancer. These vaccines are a powerful tool to help protect today's girls — tomorrow's generation of women — from cervical cancer.

But what tools are out there for women today who may be at risk?

Learn about what you can do to protect yourself against cervical cancer:

- The Pap test looks at a sample of cells taken from a woman's cervix for any cell changes or abnormalities. Pap testing should begin at age 21.
- The HPV test is conducted from the same sample as the Pap and identifies women with high-risk HPV infections that can cause cervical cancer. When used with a Pap in women 30 and older, the HPV test increases the ability to identify who is at risk of developing cervical cancer.
- If you are age 30 or older, ask your doctor for the *digene*® HPV Test together with your Pap test.
  - If both tests come back normal, then the tests don't need to be repeated for 3 years. But remember to return each year for your annual health exam.
  - If one or both tests come back abnormal, this doesn't necessarily mean you have cervical cancer. It simply enables your healthcare provider to monitor you more closely or treat pre-cancerous cells before cervical cancer develops.
  - HPV testing isn't necessary for women younger than 30, because HPV infections in young women usually go away on their own without causing problems. Women under 30 will only have HPV testing if their Pap test is inconclusive.



## Links: Helpful Web resources on cervical cancer prevention

[www.theHPVtest.com](http://www.thehpvtest.com) — Website focuses on the early detection and prevention of cervical cancer through HPV screening and Pap testing. Site includes frequently-asked-questions, patient stories, and tips on “what your test results mean.”

- Follow us on Twitter: @HPVinformed
- Visit our “Protect yourself against cervical cancer” Facebook page: <http://bit.ly/HPVTestFB>

[www.theyellowumbrella.org](http://www.theyellowumbrella.org) — The Yellow Umbrella Organization is founded by cervical cancer survivor and “rocker” Christine Baze, who takes her music and story on the road to educate women about cancer prevention.

[www.HealthyWomen.org](http://www.HealthyWomen.org) — HealthyWomen is the nation's leading independent health information source for women. Recently listed as one of Forbes' top 100 websites for women, healthywomen.org has resources on many women's health issues, including comprehensive info on cervical and gynecologic cancers.

[www.pearlofwisdom.us](http://www.pearlofwisdom.us) — The Pearl of Wisdom™ Campaign to Prevent Cervical Cancer is a global partnership to raise awareness of tools for preventing cervical cancer and advocate for making them available to girls and women worldwide. Buy a pin, send an e-card, and download educational materials.

## Top 5 HPV and cervical cancer myths

1) Myth: Only promiscuous women get HPV

**Fact: Any woman who has had sex can have HPV.**

Many people believe only promiscuous women get HPV. The truth is that any woman who has had sex, even with just one partner, could have been exposed to HPV, which is a very common virus. About 8 out of 10 women will have had HPV at some point in time by the age of 50.<sup>(1)</sup>

2) Myth: A regular Pap test is enough to protect women against cervical cancer.

**Fact: A Pap test alone is not enough to protect women against cervical cancer.**

While the Pap test has helped significantly decrease the number of cervical cancer cases in the United States, no test is perfect. Pre-cancerous cells in some women are missed. For women age 30 and older, getting the HPV test along with a Pap increases the ability to identify women at risk to nearly 100 percent. Women under age 30 should get the HPV test if their Pap results are inconclusive.

3) Myth: If you have HPV, you will probably get cervical cancer.

**Fact: HPV is very common. But cervical cancer is not.**

The truth is that having HPV does not mean you have or will get cervical cancer. Most women will be exposed to HPV at some point in their lives, and for most women, HPV infections will go away on their own without causing any problems. But in some women, the infection persists over a long period of time and causes abnormal cells to form, which can then develop into cervical cancer. With HPV testing, women with certain types of "high-risk" HPV infection can be identified and monitored carefully. If the HPV infection causes pre-cancerous cell changes, these can be detected and treated early with a Pap and other tests, before cervical cancer ever has the chance to develop.

4) Myth: Women with HPV will experience warning symptoms.

**Fact: HPV infections usually do not cause any symptoms.**

Many women think that if they don't have warning signs, they certainly could not have HPV or cervical cancer. Although some "low-risk" types of HPV can cause genital warts, the "high-risk" types that are associated with cervical cancer often go completely undetected until abnormal cells develop. That's why routine screening with Pap and HPV testing is so important if you are 30 or older.

5) Myth: If a woman gets the HPV vaccine, she no longer needs the Pap or HPV test.

**Fact: Girls and women who get the HPV vaccine will still need to be tested with the Pap test and HPV test.**

The HPV vaccine is great news, but it only protects against two of the more than a dozen types of cancer-causing HPV types. Even then, vaccination is only fully effective when given to women who have not yet been exposed to the targeted types of HPV. That means the ideal candidate for the vaccine is an adolescent girl or young woman who is not yet sexually active. The bottom line: All women, including those who are vaccinated, need regular screening with a Pap and (if they are age 30 or older) an HPV test.

1. American Cancer Society, accessed on July 12, 2010. Web site: <http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerCauses/OtherCarcinogens/InfectiousAgents/HPV/thinking-about-testing-for-hpv>.

