

Pap tests

**Help protect
yourself from
cervical cancer**



*PapScreen
Victoria*



**Cancer
Council**
Victoria

What is a Pap test?

A Pap test is a simple test to check for unhealthy changes to the cells of the cervix. Repeating the test every two years is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer.



The Pap test does not test for cervical cancer, but looks for unhealthy changes in the cervix, which if left untreated may progress to cancer.

Identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Health professionals should ask their clients if they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Collecting this information can help improve health programs and make sure culturally relevant information is provided. For these reasons, it's important to let your doctor, nurse or health worker know if you are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) and the HPV vaccine

Cervical cancer is almost always caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is passed on through genital-skin to genital-skin contact and is a normal part of being sexually active. HPV affects both men and women – four out of five people will have it at some point in their lives.

A vaccine is available to help protect you from HPV and cervical cancer. The vaccine is available free of charge in schools to girls aged 12–13. Vaccinating girls at this age gives good protection from most cervical cancers.

Any female aged 9 to 45 years can have the HPV vaccine, however it may not work as well in women who have already had sex. Ask your doctor, nurse or health worker if it would be good for you to have the vaccine. The vaccine costs around \$450 in total, unless you are having it as part of the free school program.

Even if you have had the vaccine, it's really important to keep having a Pap test every two years between the ages of 18 and 70.

Who needs a Pap test?

All women between the ages of 18 and 70 who have ever been sexually active should have a Pap test every two years.

Sexual activity includes genital-skin to genital-skin contact. Lesbians need Pap tests too.

What if I've had a hysterectomy?

A hysterectomy is an operation to remove the uterus. In most cases the cervix is removed as well.

You might need to continue having Pap tests though, depending on:

- > if the cervix was removed
- > the reason you had a hysterectomy.

It's best to speak to your doctor, nurse or health worker about this.

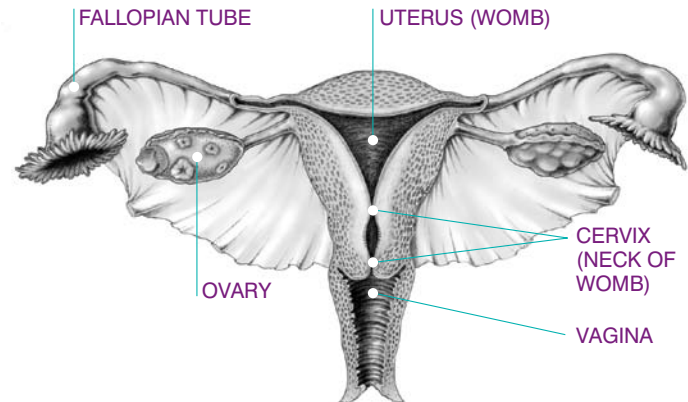
How is a Pap test done?

Call or visit your doctor, nurse or local health service and ask to make a time to have a Pap test. The Pap test is usually done in the doctor or nurse's consulting room or clinic.

The doctor or nurse will use an instrument called a speculum to open the vagina so that the cervix can be seen more clearly. Some cells are then taken from the cervix using a small brush. The cells are put onto a glass slide and sent to a laboratory to be tested.

The Pap test might be a bit uncomfortable, but it shouldn't hurt. If it hurts, tell your doctor or nurse straight away.

THE FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM



What about the results?

Ask your doctor, nurse or health worker when and how you can get your results. Remember, most Pap test results are normal, but you need to have the test to make sure.

What if my results are not normal?

If your results are not normal, this does not mean you have cancer. It may be something simple like an infection that will clear up naturally. Some types of unhealthy cells may need treatment.

Your doctor, nurse or health worker will talk to you about treatment options.

How effective are Pap tests?

The Pap test is not perfect, but it is the best test there is to find any changes in the cells of the cervix.

If your results are not normal, this does not mean you have cancer.

Pap test reminders

When you have your Pap test, your name goes on the Victorian Pap Test Registry. A reminder letter will be sent to you when you are due or overdue for your next Pap test.

This is a confidential service. If you do not want to get reminder letters, tell your doctor, nurse or health worker after you have had your test.

Where can I go to have a Pap test?

- › Your doctor
- › An Aboriginal health service
- › Some women's and community health centres
- › Well Women's services at hospitals

Remember, you should have a Pap test even if you are healthy. This is because cervical cancer and unhealthy cervical cell changes usually have no symptoms.

If you have any problems, like unexpected bleeding, you should talk to your doctor, nurse or health worker immediately, even if you recently had a normal Pap test.

For more information on
Pap tests and Pap test results,
or if you're not sure where to
go for your Pap test contact
the Cancer Council Helpline on
13 11 20, visit **papscreen.org.au**
or visit your local Aboriginal
health service.

For more information about
the HPV vaccine visit
hpvvaccine.org.au

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