



planned
parenthood
TORONTO

**YOUR
HEALTH.
YOUR
CHOICE.**

Abnormal Pap Tests

Talk to your partner(s) about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and your health before you have sex. You can pass on an STI without knowing you have one. During sex, you can use latex condoms to lower your chances of getting STIs.

What is a pap test?

It is a simple test that checks for abnormal cells on your cervix (the opening to your uterus). A pap test is done during a pelvic exam. You should have a pap test done every year. The best time to have a pap test is one week after your period is finished.

How is a pap test done?

To do a pap test, a clinician will put an instrument called a speculum into your vagina. This will let them see your cervix. Some of the cells from your cervix are gently wiped off with a small broom. The top of the broom is put into a container and sent to the lab.

What does an abnormal pap test mean?

If your pap test result showed “benign atypia” this means that there was a slight change in the cells of your cervix. This result is usually nothing to worry about. It may be because the pap test was done near the time when you had your period or near the time when you last had vaginal intercourse. Douching and having an infection like yeast can also cause benign atypia. If your pap test showed benign atypia you may be advised to have another pap test in six months. A pap test may also show abnormal cell growth that is called “dysplasia”. Dysplasia is not cancer. Dysplasia means that there is a change in the cells of your cervix that in the future might become cancer if they are not treated.

What might cause dysplasia?

A sexually transmitted infection called Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is believed to be the number one cause of dysplasia. Factors that may increase the risk of dysplasia include long term use of high-dose steroids, smoking, and unprotected vaginal intercourse because it increases the chances of being exposed to HPV. Sometimes there is no reason.

What is a colposcopy?

Since the pap test is only a screening test and not a diagnostic tool, your clinician may want to have a gynecologist take a closer look at your cervix in order to determine the cause of abnormal pap results. This visual examination of the cervix is called a colposcopy.

How is a colposcopy done?

The gynecologist will use a special microscope called a colposcope to look at the cervix. The colposcope is placed near the opening of your vagina. It will not touch you or go into your vagina. The doctor puts a speculum into your vagina like when you have a pap test. Your cervix will be washed with a mixture of vinegar and water to better visualize the area. This may sting a little. The actual procedure lasts approximately ten to fifteen minutes and is relatively simple and painless.

Sometimes the doctor may take tiny samples of the cells of your cervix called biopsies and this additional procedure may be more uncomfortable. You may feel cramps like when you have your period. You may also have some spotting or bleeding for a few days. Biopsies are sent to the laboratory for special testing. It will take about two weeks to get the results. Depending on the results of the biopsy you may need further treatment.

Can dysplasia be treated?

Yes, there are many ways to treat dysplasia. The gynecologist will discuss with you if you need treatment and what the best treatment would be. Most treatments are done in the doctor's office.

Can dysplasia come back after treatment?

There is always a chance that dysplasia can come back. If it comes back it can be treated again. The risk of dysplasia coming back is much higher if you smoke. Ask your gynecologist when you should have a follow up appointment.

Things to remember:

- ★ You should not be on your period when you go for a colposcopy exam.
- ★ Do not have sex, douche, or use a tampon for 24 hours before a colposcopy.
- ★ Ask the doctor or nurse to explain what is happening. You have a right to know.
- ★ Ask the doctor or nurse how to take care of yourself after the colposcopy.
- ★ Any unusual symptoms following the procedure like heavy vaginal bleeding, lower abdominal pain or fever/chills should be immediately reported back to your gynecologist.
- ★ Ask when you should have another pap test and how often you should have them done.
- ★ If you smoke try to quit.
- ★ Using a condom every time you have sex will lower your chances of getting HPV and other sexually transmitted infections.

If you need further information or would like to book an appointment, call:

Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services for youth ages 13 to 29. 416-927-7171. Health Services offers same-day, scheduled and drop-in appointments. For more information visit www.ppt.on.ca.

Women's Programming at the Bay Centre for Birth Control for women of all ages at 416-351-3700.

Youth can also access information about sexual health by calling the Teen Sex InfoLine at 416-961-3200 or chat live using MSN messenger at spiderbytes@hotmail.com from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Wednesday and 12 noon to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. You can also email us a question anytime at askus@spiderbytes.ca or visit www.spiderbytes.ca.

It is important to use condoms or a latex barrier with sexual partners to decrease the risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.