

tool kit for teen care Pap Tests fact sheet

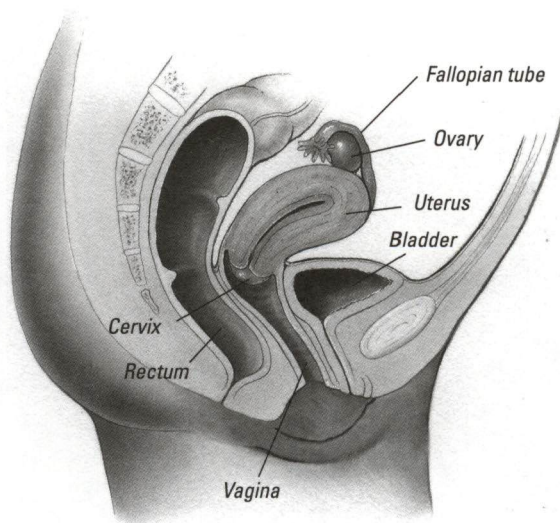


What is a Pap test?

- A Pap test, sometimes called a Pap smear, tests the cells of the cervix for any abnormal changes that might lead to cancer.
- A Pap test can find changes in the cervix that can be treated before they cause cancer or find cancer early so it's easier to cure.

What is the cervix?

- The cervix is the opening from the uterus into the vagina. It is inside a woman's body, at the top of the vagina.



Female Reproductive System

Who needs to have a Pap test?

- A teen should have her first Pap test no later than 3 years after first having sexual intercourse.
- Any female who is 21 years or older, even if she has never had sexual intercourse.

How often should a Pap test be done?

- Once a year if a woman is sexually active.
- More frequent Pap tests may be needed if an abnormal test result is found or for women at high risk.

How is a Pap test done?

- The doctor or nurse will insert a small instrument into the vagina and use a swab or a little brush to wipe some cells from the cervix. It takes just a few seconds. A medical laboratory then checks these cells. The doctor's office will inform the woman of the test results.

Does a Pap test hurt?

- Usually it does not hurt, but sometimes a little pressure may be felt.

Where can teens go to get a Pap test?

- Doctor's office (eg, obstetrician–gynecologist, family physician, pediatrician, nurse practitioner)
- Family planning clinic
- Health department

Who may get cancer of the cervix?

- Nearly 5,000 women die from cervical cancer each year. Many more are cured because it is found early with a Pap test. No one can say for sure who will get this cancer.





tool kit for teen care

- A teen is considered high risk (more likely to have abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix that can lead to cancer) if:
 - She has had sex with more than one partner.
 - Her partner has had sex with other people.
 - She has or a partner she had sex with has genital warts, caused by the human papillomavirus.
 - She has human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.
 - She smokes.

What happens if a Pap test is abnormal?

- The teen may need to repeat a Pap test in 3–6 months.
- She may need a colposcopy. This is a test where the health care provider aims a light at the cervix and uses a special microscope to look for abnormal cells. Once abnormal cells are identified, they may need to be treated to prevent cervical cancer.
- An abnormal Pap test result does not mean the teen will get cancer. Most abnormal Pap test results do not lead to cancer.

What can a teen do to protect herself?

- Abstain from intercourse.
- Limit her number of sexual partners.
- Always use latex condoms when having sex. Although this will not offer 100% protection, it is the best protection available.
- Get regular Pap tests.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

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www.acog.org

American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology

20 West Washington Street, Suite 1
Hagerstown, MD 21740
Telephone: (301) 733-3640 or 800-787-7227
www.asccp.org

AWARE Foundation

1015 Chestnut Street, Suite 1225
Philadelphia, PA 19107-4302
Telephone: (215) 955-9847
www.awarefoundation.org

Go Ask Alice!

Columbia University Health Service
www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

National Cancer Institute

31 Center Drive, MSC 2580
Building 31, Room 10A03
Bethesda, MD 20892-2580
Telephone: (301) 435-3848
www.nci.nih.gov

National Women's Health Information Center

Telephone: 800-994-WOMAN
www.4woman.org