

We encourage all women with an abnormal Pap test result to follow the advice of their practitioner.



A more detailed free booklet "Pap Test Results. A Guide for Women with an Abnormal Pap Test" is available from PapScreen Victoria – telephone 13 11 20. Written materials for women who speak languages other than English are also available from PapScreen Victoria. For further information please visit www.papscreen.org.au

Information on you and your privacy

VCS appreciates that it holds sensitive personal health information. We have strict confidentiality practices in place to protect your privacy.

How is this personal information collected?

This is collected from a practitioner who orders your test. If you provide information directly to us, this may be entered on your record as well.

How may personal information be used?

Your personal information may be used for:

- Reporting the test ordered
- Charging for services (where applicable)
- The Victorian Cervical Cytology Registry (VCCR) to remind you or your practitioner if you are overdue for a Pap test or other test. You can get more information about VCCR from your practitioner or by telephoning VCCR on (03) 9250 0399 or accessing their website at www.vccr.org
- Research to improve our knowledge, particularly on how to prevent cancer of the cervix. No research information identifies an individual person.

Does my information have to be provided to Medicare Australia?

In order for the National Cervical Screening Programme to develop an accurate picture of Pap smears in Australia, VCS sends information (name, address, date of birth and Medicare number) to Medicare Australia. This is done to monitor and improve the cervical screening programme.

However, the choice is yours. If you do not want your information to be sent to Medicare Australia, please notify us by email at director@vcs.org.au or write to us (details below). We will still report your Pap test as usual.

Our full privacy policy can be viewed on our website www.vcs.org.au or may be obtained by telephoning VCS on (03) 9250 0300.



Victorian Cytology Service

PO Box 178, Carlton South, Victoria
Telephone: (03) 9250 0300 Fax: (03) 9349 1949
Website: www.vcs.org.au

What if your Pap test result is abnormal?



Victorian Cytology Service

Abnormal Pap Test Result

The Pap test can find changes in the cells of the cervix before serious problems develop. Most of these changes are due to infection with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)¹. It is very unusual for an abnormal Pap test result to be due to cancer.

Ask the doctor or nurse who took your test to explain the result fully to you. Abnormal Pap test results are quite common. About one in 15 tests is abnormal.

There are two main types of abnormal Pap tests: low-grade abnormalities and high-grade abnormalities. These are explained further below.

Low-grade Abnormalities

These are minor changes that usually disappear over a period of time. Most low-grade abnormalities are due to infection with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

Infection with HPV is extremely common once you start having sex. Most of this infection is invisible and harmless and is cleared naturally by your body, but sometimes it causes Pap test abnormalities.

There is no specific treatment that a doctor can prescribe for you to make the HPV infection clear more quickly. Antibiotics do not treat HPV.

When a low-grade abnormality is reported, we usually recommend a repeat Pap test in 12 months. This gives time for the infection to clear and for cells to return to normal.

Sometimes an earlier check-up is recommended. This might be a repeat Pap test at 6 months or a colposcopy.

If the repeat Pap test shows either a low-grade or high-grade abnormality, a colposcopy is recommended. The next section explains more about high-grade abnormalities and colposcopy.

High-grade Abnormalities

When a Pap test shows a high-grade abnormality, the woman is usually referred to a gynaecologist for further investigation. This is because high-grade abnormalities may indicate more serious changes in the cells of the cervix. If left untreated, they have a greater chance of developing into cervical cancer.



Colposcopy

To look more closely at the cervix the gynaecologist does a colposcopy. In this examination a special microscope magnifies the cervix. If an abnormal area is seen a tiny sample of cells is taken. This called a biopsy. These cells are sent to the laboratory for further tests.

A colposcopy is like having a Pap test, but it takes longer; about 10 to 15 minutes. It can be done in the doctor's clinic.

Your practitioner will get the biopsy report within a week. They will then be able to discuss with you whether you need treatment and, if so, what type of treatment is best for you.

What if the colposcopy or biopsy is normal?

A Pap test is a screening test and, as such, it cannot give a perfect report on the health of your cervix. An abnormal Pap test report does not necessarily mean that disease will be found on further investigations.

After a Pap test report of high-grade abnormality, between 5% and 10% of women have no disease found at colposcopy or on biopsy. After a Pap test report of a low-grade abnormality, the proportion found to be normal can be up to 25%.

I've had the HPV vaccine – why is my Pap test abnormal?

The vaccine does **not** cause Pap test abnormalities.

Most Pap test abnormalities are caused by HPV. There are many different types or strains of this virus. The two available HPV vaccines protect against infection with some of these types but **not all of them**. Infection with HPV is extremely common once you start having sex. Most of this infection is invisible and harmless and is cleared naturally by your body, but sometimes it causes Pap test abnormalities.

If you had the vaccine after you started having sex it is very likely that you have had at least one of the many HPV types. Changes seen on a Pap test after infection with HPV can sometimes take months or longer to show up.

The vaccine cannot treat infection or cell changes once they are there.

Ask your health practitioner to help you with your questions. Remember to have regular Pap tests even if you have had the cervical cancer vaccine.



You may want to ask your practitioner some of the following questions.

- Can you tell me what my test result means?
- What treatment do you advise?
- If I have treatment, will I have a vaginal discharge or bleeding afterwards?
- If treatment is needed, when can I start having sex again?
- Will I need to go into hospital?
- Will I need time off work to rest?
- How often will I need to have a Pap test in the future?
- When can I go back to regular 2 yearly Pap tests?

If you develop abnormal vaginal bleeding after you have completed your investigation and treatment, return to your doctor.

¹ For further information on HPV contact PapScreen Victoria on 13 11 20 or visit www.papscreen.org.au