



## Do you need a Pap test?

Getting an annual Pap test is an important tool to help detect the early signs of cervical cancer — and it's a top reason that cervical cancer cases have decreased in frequency in the United States. That's especially important because this is a cancer that can be deadly if left untreated. January, which is Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, is a good time to ensure that all of your cancer screenings are up to date, and if you need a Pap test, make an appointment with your doctor.

### What causes cervical cancer?

Virtually all cases of cervical cancer, a cancer that starts in a woman's cervix, are caused by specific types of human papillomavirus (HPV). Many forms of HPV are very common and go away on their own. However, about 15 of the 100 types of the virus are considered to be cancer causing or high risk.

### What are the symptoms?

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, including bleeding after vaginal intercourse, bleeding and spotting between periods, having longer or heavier menstrual periods than usual and bleeding after menopause. Bleeding after douching or after a pelvic exam is a common symptom.
- An unusual vaginal discharge, which may contain some blood and may occur between your periods or after menopause.
- Pain during vaginal intercourse.

It's important to note that all of these symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cervical cancer, so women should speak to their doctor about concerns.

### How effective is a Pap test?

Pap tests can identify precancerous lesions, which can be treated before those lesions can develop into cancer. The test's inclusion as a standard component of an annual gynecological exam is a primary reason that the incidence of cervical cancer in the United States is much lower than the rest of the world.

Women should know that about 20 percent of their peers have had an abnormal result from a Pap test. Ultimately, only a fraction of those abnormal results indicate cervical cancer. A doctor may do an HPV test in conjunction with a Pap test to get a clearer picture of a woman's health.

### New treatments

Two FDA-approved vaccines, Gardasil® and Cervarix®, have been shown to be highly effective in preventing persistent infections with two high-risk HPV types that cause the majority of cervical cancers.

However, these vaccines do not replace a Pap test, and women can still develop other forms of HPV. Women should speak with their doctor about whether a Pap test is right for them.



Source: National Institutes of Health

NJWELL is an incentive-based wellness program offered to active employees and their covered spouses who participate in the SHBP/SEHBP. More detail can be found on <http://www.nj.gov/njwell/>.

**Please Note:** Preventive care services and screenings are only covered when rendered by an in-network doctor or other health care professional.

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