

CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

A Pap test is a simple screening test that can help detect abnormal cell changes in the cervix and prevent cervical cancer.



Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is an abnormal growth that starts in the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.

HPV Infection



Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the leading cause of cervical cancer.

HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection. Most people who are sexually active will get it at some point in their lifetime.

There are many types of HPV. While most HPV infections will go away on their own without causing any harm, certain types of HPV can lead to cervical cancer, when left untreated.

Prevention

You can reduce your risk of cervical cancer by getting the HPV vaccine and following the recommended schedule for cervical cancer screening.

HPV vaccination is offered for free to grade 7 students in Ontario.

You can also get the HPV vaccine by prescription. People who have been vaccinated against HPV should still be screened for cervical cancer regularly.

Get Tested

Cervical cancer screening is done with an HPV test in Ontario. **You are eligible for cervical cancer screening if you:**

- have a cervix
- are aged 25–69 (sometimes up to 74)
- have ever been sexually active
- have OHIP coverage
- have no symptoms of cervical cancer

Regular cervical cancer screening is crucial for detecting early signs of cervical cancer or abnormal cell changes that could lead to cancer if left untreated.

Screening Schedule



Starting at age 25, you should screen **every 5 years** (following a negative HPV test result).

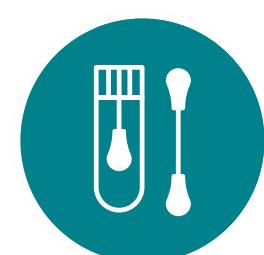


If **immunocompromised**, screen **every 3 years** (following a negative HPV test result).

Early changes to the cervix may not cause any obvious symptoms. You should still go for cervical cancer screening if you:

- feel healthy
- are no longer sexually active
- have only had one sexual partner
- are in a same-sex relationship
- have been through menopause
- have received the HPV vaccine

Preparing for an HPV Test



An HPV test is a simple test that screens for infection with HPV types that can cause cancer if left untreated.

Book an appointment with your healthcare provider and they will do an HPV test for you. Try to book on a day when you don't have your period and avoid having sex or using tampons for 48 hours before the test.

1

You'll undress from the waist down and put on a hospital gown.

2

You will lie on an exam table, potentially with your feet in stirrups.

3

An instrument will be inserted into your vagina to hold it open, to show the cervix.

4

Your healthcare provider will use a small swab or spatula to remove cells from the cervix.

5

The sample taken by your healthcare provider will be sent to a lab for testing.

Results

If you test **positive** for HPV, the lab will automatically do follow-up testing on your test sample to check for cell changes in the cervix. You will either be referred for additional testing or asked to repeat cervical screening in 2 years.

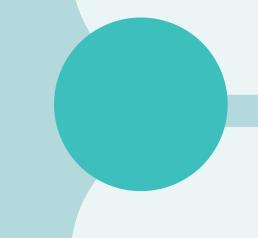
If your test result is **negative**, you'll receive a reminder to return for testing after 5 years (or after 3 years if you are immunocompromised).

Signs & Symptoms

Cervical cancer may not cause any signs or symptoms in its early stages. Talk to your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following:



Abnormal vaginal bleeding (ex. between periods)



Abnormal vaginal discharge



Difficulty urinating or having a bowel movement



Pain during sexual intercourse



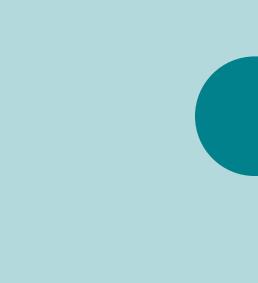
Pain in the pelvic area or lower back that may go down one leg



Swelling of the leg, often only on one side



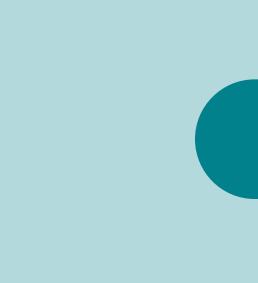
Unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite, or fatigue



Uterus



Cervix



Vagina