

The Pap Test

The Pap test (or pap smear) is a test that looks for cervical cancer. The test also looks for early changes in the cells of the cervix that may need treatment so that cancer never gets a chance to develop.

The Pap test only checks for cervical cancer. It does not detect other forms of gynecologic cancer.

When should I get a Pap Test?

A person with a cervix should have their first Pap test at age 21, and then every three to five years.

How is it done?

The clinician will insert a speculum into the vagina in order to see the cervix. Cells are then gently scraped from the opening of the cervix, placed in a collection jar and sent to the lab for testing.

Then what?

Most Pap test results will be normal. If your Pap test is abnormal, you may need to come back sooner to repeat the test. You may receive a phone call, or a letter asking you to return to the clinic in the next year. Often the changes to the cells will have gone back to normal at the time of the repeat Pap test and you won't need any treatment. If the changes are more serious and/or do not go back to normal, we may need to refer you for more testing.

More details on the Pap test

- The cells on a cervix go through normal changes with age. The Pap test is looking for abnormal cell changes, which are usually due to the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are many types of HPV and only a few cause changes to the cervix. Most sexually active people have already been exposed to HPV, but only a few of these people develop these abnormal changes.
- There is an HPV vaccine recommended for those ages 9-26 that is effective at preventing warts and cervical cancer. At City Clinic, we have this vaccine for uninsured people through age 26 and for some patients through age 45 based on a conversation between the patient and clinician.
- A pelvic exam is not the same as a Pap test, and Pap tests are not done at every pelvic exam.

The Pelvic Exam

The pelvic examination is an exam of your vagina (inside and outside), and cervix (opening of the uterus). Your clinician will look inside the vagina with a speculum (an instrument that lets the clinician see inside the vagina). If you are due for a Pap test, the clinician may perform the pap at this time (see reverse).

If you are having symptoms, some vaginal fluid (discharge) will be collected and looked at under the microscope in the clinic to check for infection (yeast, trichomonas, bacterial vaginosis). This procedure is called a wet mount exam.

If needed, your clinician may also do a bi-manual exam after the speculum exam. The clinician will put two fingers into the vagina and press with the other hand on your belly to feel the uterus and ovaries. This part of the exam can help to evaluate pain, abnormal bleeding, infections and other symptoms.

Tests for STIs

Your clinician may do tests for STIs. This is most often done from a swab of the vaginal wall, but can also be done from a urine specimen. Tests for herpes or syphilis may be done if sores are present. Further testing for syphilis and HIV (if needed) is done with blood samples, not from specimens collected during the pelvic exam.

Pap Test

For more information on Pap tests and when you should have one, please see the other side of this handout. A pelvic exam is not the same as a Pap test, and Pap tests are not done at every pelvic exam.

Please note:

It is important to talk to your clinician about what tests are being done. The decision to do certain tests is based on your sexual history and your risk factors.

For more information about STI's, consult these websites:

General STI

www.ashsexualhealth.org (also in Español)

www.cdc.gov/std/

www.sfcityclinc.org

www.sfsi.org/

Teens

www.iwannaknow.org

www.kidshealth.org/teen (also in Español)

www.scarleteen.com

Contraception and STI/sex info

www.bedsider.org

For a STI check-up or treatment,
see your health care provider, local clinic, or come to:



A landmark in prevention

City Clinic
356 7th Street
(between Folsom and Harrison)
San Francisco, CA 94103
(628) 217-6600
www.sfcityclinc.org

