

Cervical Cancer Screening

The most important risk factor for [cervical cancer](#) is infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are over 100 different types of HPV; however, most types of HPV do not cause cancer. In most cases, the body's immune system clears the HPV virus infection before it does harm.

What is cervical screening and why is it important?

Cervical screening is procedure to detect potential cervical abnormalities or diseases by some test or examinations, in people who do not have any symptoms of disease.

In cervical cancer, there is interval of around 10 years from HPV infection to development of cervical cancer. In short, there is long period before cervical cancer development. Hence, regular check-up with screening test can detect cervical cancer in very early or precancerous stage. So, this will help your physician to provide better treatment in early stage of cancer.

Cervical cancer screening can be done with different methods.

There are two tests available for cervical cancer screening.

1. HPV test (RT-PCR)

This is newer technique which detect HPV infection of cervix. This is preferred test for cervical cancer screening. As per screening guidelines, this test needs to be done every five years interval. This is more accurate in detection of HPV infection & precancerous cervical lesion in comparison with PAP smear.

2. PAP smear test:

Traditional method for cervical cancer screening. This is appropriate test for screening in resource poor setting. As per screening recommendation, this test needs to be done every three years interval. This is less sensitive to diagnose precancerous cervical lesion in comparison with HPV test.

Method for collection of sample for screening test

Sample collection technique is very easy & fast which may take around 3-5 minutes. It may be uncomfortable but usually it is not painful.

Who should be screened for Cervical Cancer and when?

According to ACS (American Cancer society 2020) guideline,

- Women from 25 to 65 years of age
- Screening should be done even after HPV vaccination
- HPV-only testing also called primary HPV testing) every five years if all results are normal (see 'HPV test' above)
- A Pap test every three years if all results are normal (see 'Pap test' above)
- After age 65 — Most experts feel that many people can stop having cervical cancer screening after the age of 65, though it depends on their risk factors.

Screening test results

- Pap test — If a Pap test was done as part of your cervical cancer screening, the results from your Pap test will be available after 5-7 working days of your visit. Pap test results may be reported as:
 - Negative – Pap tests that have no abnormal, precancerous, or cancerous cells.
 - Abnormal results – Cervical cells may appear abnormal for a variety of reasons (e.g. cervical infection, precancerous area and cervical cancer).
- HPV test — If a human papillomavirus (HPV) test was done as part of your cervical cancer screening, the results will be available after 5-7 working days of your visit. The results may be reported as:
 - Negative – There are no high-risk HPV strains present.
 - Positive – There are high-risk HPV strains present.

Follow-up testing — If your Pap or HPV test results are abnormal, you may need follow-up testing; the best strategy will depend on several individual factors.