

What Does My Pap Test Result Mean?

Your Pap test will come back as “normal,” “unclear,” or “abnormal.”

Normal



A normal (or “negative”) result means that no cell changes were found on your cervix. This is good news. But you still need to get Pap tests in the future. New cell changes can still form on your cervix.

Unclear



It is common for test results to come back unclear. Your doctor may use other words to describe this result, like **equivocal**, **inconclusive**, or **ASC-US**. These all mean the same thing—that your cervical cells look like they could be abnormal. It is not clear if it’s related to HPV. It could be related to life changes like pregnancy, menopause, or an infection. The HPV test can help find out if your cell changes are related to HPV.

Abnormal



An **abnormal** result means that cell changes were found on your cervix. This usually does not mean that you have cervical cancer.

Abnormal changes on your cervix are likely caused by HPV. The changes may be minor (low-grade) or serious (high-grade). Most of the time, minor changes go back to normal on their own. But more serious changes can turn into cancer if they are not removed. The more serious changes are often called “**precancer**” because they are not yet cancer, but they can turn into cancer over time.

In rare cases, an abnormal Pap test can show that you may have cancer. You will need other tests to be sure. The earlier you find cervical cancer, the easier it is to treat.

What Does My HPV Test Result Mean?

Your HPV test will come back as either “positive” or “negative.”

- A negative HPV test means you do not have an HPV type that is linked to cervical cancer.
- A positive HPV test means you do have an HPV type that may be linked to cervical cancer. This does not mean you have cervical cancer now. But it could be a warning.

HPV test results are meaningful only with your Pap test results. To understand what these tests mean together, see the following pages:

- If your HPV test is negative (normal), see page 8.
- If your HPV test is positive (abnormal), see page 9.



“I see my doctor regularly for a Pap test. This year, my doctor told me the test was abnormal. He also said I have HPV. I was confused. What does this mean?”

“HPV” stands for “human papillomavirus.”
For more definitions, see the glossary.



HPV and Pap Test Results

If your HPV test is negative (normal), and your...

Pap test is normal

This means

- You are very unlikely to have HPV in your cervix.
- Your cervical cells are normal.
- You have a very low chance of getting cervical cancer in the next few years.

You should

- Wait 5 years before being tested again.
- Ask your doctor when to come in for your next visit.

Pap test is unclear (ASC-US)

This means

- You do not have HPV, but your Pap test was unclear.
- Even if you do have cell changes, it is unlikely that they are caused by HPV.

You should

- Ask your doctor when to come in for your next visit.

Pap test is abnormal

This means

- Your Pap test found abnormal cells.
- Your HPV test did not find HPV.
- It's important to find out why the two tests are showing different things.

Your doctor may

- Take a closer look at your cervix (called a **colposcopy**) to find out if your cells are abnormal and/or treat you right away.

HPV and Pap Test Results

If your HPV test is positive (abnormal), and your...

Pap test is normal

This means

- Your cervical cells are normal, but you have HPV.
- You may fight off HPV naturally and never get cell changes. Or you may not fight off HPV, and HPV could cause cell changes in the future.
- Most women fight off HPV within 2 years. It is not known why most women fight off HPV and some do not.

You should

- Get another Pap and HPV test in 1 year. Cell changes happen slowly. Some time must pass before your doctor can tell if HPV will go away or cause cell changes.

Pap test is unclear (ASC-US)

This means

- You have HPV, but your Pap test was unclear.

Your doctor will

- Take a closer look at your cervix (called a colposcopy) to find out if your cells are abnormal.
- Your doctor may need to either remove the abnormal cells or monitor them to make sure they do not get worse.

Pap test is abnormal

This means

- You have HPV.
- Your cervical cells are abnormal.
- This does not usually mean you have cancer.

Your doctor will

- Take a closer look at your cervix to find out if your cells are abnormal and how serious the cell changes are.
- Your doctor may need to remove the abnormal cells to make sure they do not get worse.