

# Human Papillomavirus (HPV)



## Does this test have other names?

HPV DNA test, DNA Pap, HPV co-test

## What is this test?

This test checks for the human papillomavirus (HPV) around the cervix. There are different kinds of HPV. The viruses can cause warts, such as plantar warts on the bottom of the feet, and genital warts. They can also cause different kinds of cancers. These include cervical, throat, and anal cancers.

More than 100 types of HPV have been found. Few carry a high cancer risk. Some types of HPV are linked to cervical cancer.

HPV can travel from person to person during sexual contact. It's one of the most widely spread sexually transmitted infections.

## Why do I need this test?

You may need this test to see if you have HPV. Long-term infection with HPV is the greatest risk factor for cervical cancer. So this test is often used to check women for viruses that could cause this cancer.

A primary HPV test (one that is done for screening alone) is advised as a cervical cancer screening test for women ages 25 to 65 every 5 years. An HPV test may be done if a woman in her early 20s has an abnormal Pap test. A Pap test checks for abnormal cervical cells or cervical cancer.

Testing for cancer-causing HPV in the anus is not often done.

## What other tests might I have along with this test?

If primary HPV testing isn't available to you, you may have a test that combines a Pap test with an HPV test (called co-testing). This would be done every 5 years. Or just a Pap test every 3 years.

The American Cancer Society suggests that women should start screening for cervical cancer at age 25.

An HPV test is done in the same way as a Pap test. Your healthcare provider takes a sample of cells from your cervix to check for abnormal cells.

## What do my test results mean?

Test results may vary depending on your age, gender, health history, and other things. Your test results may be different depending on the lab used. They may not mean you have a problem. Ask your healthcare provider what your test results mean for you.

Tests for cervical HPV check for DNA from several types of HPV. The test will show if it found types of HPV that could cause cancer. The results may be:

- **Negative.** This means that the test didn't find HPV types that could cause cancer. Or this means it found only types that carry a low risk for cancer.
- **Positive.** This means the test found at least 1 HPV type that could cause cancer. It doesn't mean that you have cancer. But it may mean you need other tests.

## How is this test done?

This test is done with a sample of cells from your cervix. To collect the sample, your healthcare provider will put a speculum into your vagina to reach the cervix. Your provider will use one or more tools shaped like a spatula, brush, or both. These are used to collect samples of cells in the cervix.

## **Does this test pose any risks?**

This test poses no known risks.

## **What might affect my test results?**

The results don't seem to be affected by menstrual blood or lubricant in the vagina. Little is known about the effect of vaginal intercourse, tampons, and douching shortly before test.

## **How do I get ready for this test?**

Ask your healthcare provider if you need to do anything to prepare for this test. If you are having a Pap test along with HPV testing, the ACS recommends staying away from all of the below 2 to 3 days before a Pap test:

- Sexual intercourse
- Douches
- Tampons
- Vaginal cream
- Birth control foam or jelly

Be sure your healthcare provider knows about all medicines, herbs, vitamins, and supplements you are taking. This includes medicines that don't need a prescription and any illegal drugs you may use.

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