Pap Smear

Pap smears are obtained from the cervix and vagina to detect the presence of cancer cells or infections. A PAP smear is done to screen for cervical cancer.

- The first PAP smear should be done at age 21.
- **Between ages 21 and 29**, **PAP smears are repeated every 2 years**.
- Beginning at age 30, you are advised to have a PAP smear **every 3 years as long as your past 3 PAP smears have been normal.**
- Some women have medical problems that increase the chance of getting cervical cancer. Talk to your caregiver about these problems. It is especially important to talk to your caregiver if a new problem develops soon after your last PAP smear. **In these cases, your caregiver may recommend more frequent screening and Pap smears.**
- The above recommendations are the same for women who **have** or **have not** gotten the vaccine for HPV (Human Papillomavirus).
- If you had a hysterectomy for a problem that was **not** a cancer or a condition that could lead to cancer, then you no longer need Pap smears.
- If you are between ages 65 and 70, and you have had normal Pap smears going back 10 years, you no longer need Pap smears.
- If you have had past treatment for cervical cancer or a condition that could lead to cancer, you need Pap smears and screening for cancer for at least 20 years after your treatment.

Ask your caregiver if you should have one done more or less often. A Pap smear should be performed during the weeks before the start of menstruation. It is not as good a test during your menstrual period. Do not douche or have intercourse in the 24 hours before your exam.

The specimen is usually taken from the cervix with a scraper, swab, or brush, and it is spread on a slide. This is then carefully examined with a microscope by a specialist. If bleeding occurs from the scraping, it will almost always be minor. The results of your pap smear should be available in 1-2 weeks. Make sure you know how you are to get your results. Call your caregiver if you have questions or concerns about your exam and test results.

For the protection of your privacy, test results cannot be given over the phone. Make sure you find out the results of the Pap smear. If you have not received the results within two weeks, contact your caregiver's office for the results. Do not assume everything is normal if you have not heard from your caregiver or medical facility. It is important to follow up on all of your test results.

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