CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING – FAQ

What Is HPV & HPV Testing?

- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI), spread by intimate skin-to-skin contact (oral, vaginal, or anal sex).[2]
- HPV can appear soon after exposure or years later.
- About 3 in 4 sexually active Canadians will get HPV at some point, usually without symptoms. Most infections clear to undetectable levels naturally within 2 years.[3]
- There are many types of HPV. Some high-risk types (especially HPV 16 and 18), if left untreated, can cause cell changes that lead to cervical cancer over time.[3]
- HPV testing finds cervical pre-cancer & cancer earlier and more accurately than Pap tests.[4]
- Anyone with a cervix aged 25–69, including cisgender women, Two-Spirit, transmasculine, and non-binary people who have ever been sexually active should be screened.[5]
- If you've had gender-affirming surgery and no longer have a cervix, contact Cancer Care Ontario (416-971-9800) to stop reminders.
- If no high-risk HPV is found, your next test is due in 5 years.[4]

"HPV Detected" – What does this mean?

- **It does not mean you have cancer.** It does mean you currently have HPV.
- You cannot tell when or from whom the HPV was acquired.[7]
- HPV may be re-detected in the future even without new sexual activity. This usually reflects immune changes, not a new infection.[7]

Next Steps

- Your follow-up will depend on the type of HPV found and what your cervical cells look like:
  - If **no abnormal cells** are found: you will have another screening test in 2 years to check that the HPV has cleared.
  - If **high-risk HPV** (types 16, 18, 45) and/or **abnormal cells** are found: you will be referred to colposcopy for further assessment.
- Regular screening helps detect persistent HPV infection, which can sometimes lead to cervical cancer.

Do I Have to Tell My Partner?

- No — it's your choice.

Should My Partner Be Screened?

- Partners with a cervix aged 25–69 should get regular screening.[2]
- Partners without a cervix (e.g., most men) don't need cervical screening, but may discuss HPV and related risks (penile, anal, throat cancers) with their healthcare provider.

Should I Get the HPV Vaccine if I Already Have HPV?[8]

- You may still benefit, even if HPV is detected. Approved for use up to age 45.
- The vaccine does not treat current infection, but can protect against other high-risk types you haven't had.
- Helps prevent future cancers (cervical, throat, anal, and more).
- Discuss with your provider what's best for you.

Lowering Your Risk

Get the HPV vaccine: Protects against most harmful HPV types.
Use condoms: Lowers HPV and STI risk.
Don't smoke: Smoking weakens the immune system and makes it harder to clear HPV.

When to See a Healthcare Provider

Call your provider if you notice:

- Vaginal bleeding after sex, between periods, or after menopause
- Abnormal or increased vaginal discharge
- Unexplained pelvic pain or pain during sex

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Questions?

Contact our clinic at (416) 469-6464 to book an appointment with your care provider.