

Abnormal Pap Smear

- ❖ The Pap test (also called a Pap smear) is a way to examine cells collected from the cervix and vagina. This test can show the presence of infection, inflammation, abnormal cells, or cancer and is an important step to the prevention of cervical cancer and is performed at your annual exam.
- ❖ **Our physicians *personally* review EVERY PAP Smear performed on our patients**
- ❖ Approximately 15,000 American women are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year and about 5,000 die of the disease.
- ❖ In areas of the world where Pap tests are not widely available, cervical cancer is a leading cause of cancer deaths in women.
- ❖ A Pap smear can assist your doctor in catching cervical cancer early. Early detection of cervical dysplasia (abnormal cells on the cervix) and treatment are the best ways to prevent the development of cervical cancer.

What do abnormal Pap smear results mean?

Abnormal Pap smear results can indicate mild or serious abnormalities.

- Most abnormal cells on the surface of the cervix are not cancerous.
- It is important to remember that abnormal conditions do not always become cancerous, and some conditions are more of a threat than others.

There are several terms that may be used to describe abnormal results.

- **Dysplasia** is a term used to describe abnormal cells.
 - Dysplasia is not cancer, although it may develop into cancer of the cervix if not treated.
 - The cells look abnormal under the microscope, but they do not invade

nearby healthy tissue.

- There are two degrees of dysplasia, classified as *low grade or high grade*, depending on how abnormal the cells have become. An older classification system described abnormal cells as mild, moderate, or severe. The newer classifications are:
 - **Squamous intraepithelial lesion (SIL)** is another term that is used to describe dysplastic changes.
 - The word *squamous* describes cells which are thin, flat, and lie on the outer surface of the cervix.
 - An *intraepithelial lesion* means that the abnormal cells are present only in the surface layers of the cells.
 - The word *lesion* refers to abnormal tissue.
 - A doctor may describe SIL as being *low-grade* (early changes in the size, shape, and number of cells) or *high-grade* (a large number of precancerous cells that look very different from normal cells).
 - **Cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN)** is another term that is sometimes used to describe abnormal cells.
 - *Intraepithelial* refers to the surface layers of the cells.
 - *Neoplasia* means a new abnormal growth of cells.
 - The term *CIN, along with a number (1 to 3)* describes how much of the cervix contains abnormal cells.
 - **Carcinoma-in-situ** describes a *pre-invasive cancer* that involves only the *surface cells and has not spread into deeper tissues*.
 - *Cervical cancer, or invasive cervical cancer*, occurs when abnormal cells spread *deeper* into the cervix or to other tissues or organs.
 - It is important to remember that *carcinoma-in-situ is not cervical cancer*.
- Milder abnormalities are often referred to as **ASCUS** (atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance) and **LGSIL** (low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesions).
 - At present, many physicians recommend immediate **colposcopy and biopsy** for *ASCUS with positive HPV, depending on your age*.
 - Recommendations for LGSIL vary depending on your age.

- This is because the mild abnormalities may disappear spontaneously
- Or may indicate the presence of a more serious abnormality (HSIL) or risk of progression to HSIL.
- With ASCUS and a negative HPV most physicians perform only repeat Pap tests.

Most abnormalities on Pap tests are the result of HPV infection.

- There are more than 70 known types of HPV
- Less than half infect the cervix
- Not all of the types found in the cervix are the high-risk types that have been linked to HGSIL and cancer.

If a PAP test has a diagnosis of ASCUS, the lab will automatically test for HPV to determine if a colposcopy is needed..

What should I do if the results of the test are abnormal?

- ❖ If the Pap test shows an **unclear or minor abnormality**, we may repeat the test to ensure accuracy.
- ❖ If the Pap test shows a **significant abnormality**, your physician will perform a **colposcopy** using a microscope (called a colposcope) to examine the vagina and the cervix. This is an IN-OFFICE procedure.
- ❖ We may also remove a small amount of cervical tissue for examination by a pathologist. This procedure is called a **biopsy** and is the only sure way to know whether the abnormal cells on the Pap smear indicate an abnormality that requires treatment.

You should discuss these tests and any other tests or treatment alternatives with us as guidelines are constantly being amended. Our many years of experience enable us to give you the best care and clearest path to good health.