

The Pap Smear

The Pap Test (or pap smear) is a test that looks for cervical cancer. The test also looks for early changes that may need treatment so that cancer never gets a chance to develop.

The Pap test only screens for cervical cancer. It does not detect other forms of gynecologic cancer.

When should I get a Pap Smear?

A woman should have her first pap smear at age 21, and then every three years.

How is it done?

The clinician will insert a speculum into the vagina in order to see the cervix. Loose cells are then gently scraped from the opening of the cervix, placed in a collection jar and sent to the lab for analysis.

Then what?

You may receive a phone call, or a letter asking you to return to the clinic for a repeat pap if changes are found on your pap smear. Many of the changes will have gone back to normal and won't need any treatment. If the changes are more serious and/or persistent, we may need to take a closer look at the cervix with a colposcope (magnifying lens).

More details on the "Pap Test"

- The cells on a woman's cervix go through normal changes with age. The pap test is looking for abnormal cell changes, which are usually due to the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are many types of HPV and only a few cause changes to the cervix. Most women who have had more than two sexual partners in their life have already been exposed to HPV. But only a few of these women develop these abnormal changes.
- At City Clinic, we do not test for HPV on pap smears.
- There is an HPV vaccine recommended for women ages 9-26 that is effective at preventing warts and the early changes of cervical cancer. At City Clinic we have this vaccine for uninsured women who are under age 26 who meet certain criteria.
- A pelvic exam is not the same as a "pap smear," and pap smears are not done at every pelvic exam.

The Pelvic Exam

The pelvic examination is a "check-up" of your vagina (inside and outside), and cervix (opening of the uterus). Your clinician will look inside the vagina with a speculum (an instrument that lets the clinician see inside the vagina). If you are due for a pap smear, the clinician may perform the pap at this time. (see reverse)

If you are having symptoms, some vaginal fluid (discharge) will be collected and looked at under the microscope in the clinic to check for infection (yeast, trichomonas, bacterial vaginosis). This procedure is called a "wet mount exam".

If needed, your clinician may also do a "bi-manual exam" after the speculum exam. He/she will put two fingers into the vagina and press with the other hand on your belly to feel the uterus and ovaries. This part of the exam can help to evaluate pain, abnormal bleeding, infections and other symptoms.

Tests for STDs

Your clinician may do tests for gonorrhea and chlamydia. This is most often done from a swab of the vaginal wall, but can also be done from a urine specimen. Swabs for herpes or syphilis may be done if sores are present. Further testing for syphilis and HIV (if indicated) is done with blood samples, not from specimens collected during the pelvic exam.

Pap Smear

For more information on pap smears and when you should have one, please see reverse the other side of this handout. A pelvic exam is not the same as a "pap smear", and pap smears are not done at every pelvic exam.

Please note:

It is important to talk to your clinician about what tests are being done. The decision to do certain tests is based on your medical sexual history and your risk factors. At the end of a visit where a pelvic exam is done, find out exactly what tests were done.

For more information about STD's, consult these websites:

General STD

www.ashsexualhealth.org (also in Espanol)
www.cdc.gov/std/
www.sfcityclinic.org
www.sfsi.org/

Teens

www.iwannaknow.org
www.amplifyyourvoice.org (also in Espanol)
www.kidshealth.org/teen (also in Espanol)
www.scarleteen.com

Contraception and STD/sex info

www.bedsider.org

For a STD check-up or treatment,
see your doctor, local clinic, or come to:



City Clinic
356 7th Street
(between Folsom and Harrison)
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 487-5500
www.sfcityclinic.org