How can I find out more about cervical cancer screening?
For help understanding the results of your screening tests, go to www.arhp.org.
*ARHP does not endorse Web sites but these resources may be useful.

Non-Profit Organizations
American Social Health Association (ASHA)
Information about HPV and cervical cancer prevention
www.ashastd.org
American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology (ASCCP)
Information on the study, prevention, diagnosis and management of lower genital tract disorders.
www.asccp.org
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP)
Information about HPV and cervical cancer prevention
www.arhp.org and www.arhp.org/PapResults
National Women’s Health Resource Center
“Health Center” on cervical cancer
www.healthywomen.org
Planned Parenthood
Information on cervical cancer prevention
www.plannedparenthood.org

Government Agency
National Cancer Institute
Cervical cancer screening information
www.nci.nih.gov/cancertopics/pdq/screening/cervical/patient

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A Woman’s Guide to Understanding HPV and Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) and can be prevented. Talk with your health care provider about screening for cervical cancer. This brochure will help you make sense of cervical cancer, HPV, and cervical cancer screening.

What is cervical cancer?
• The cervix is the lower part of your uterus (womb).
• Cancer of the cervix (cervical cancer) is a serious but preventable disease.
• Screening tests can find changes in cervical cells before cancer develops.
• Changes in cervical cells before cancer develops are called dysplasia (dis-PLAY-zha).
• Removing cells that have dysplasia can prevent cervical cancer.
• If left untreated, dysplasia can lead to cervical cancer.
• Screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer.
• Cervical cancer can be cured if it’s found at an early stage.

What causes cervical cancer?
• Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV).
• HPV is not the same as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, which causes AIDS) or herpes simplex virus (HSV, which causes cold sores and genital herpes).
• Infection with HPV is very common among adults in the United States. In fact, most people will have HPV at some point in their lives.
• Usually, your body’s immune system fights off the infection, and HPV goes away on its own.
Talking with Your Partner About HPV

Finding out you have HPV can be disturbing. You may be concerned that your partner was unfaithful. Your partner may think that you were. It’s really important to make sure you both have the facts about HPV:

- Most adults have HPV at some time during their lives.
- HPV doesn’t cause symptoms and usually goes away on its own.
- Most people with HPV don’t know they have it.
- Usually it is impossible to know which partner gave a person HPV.
- HPV is not a sign that you or your partner was unfaithful.
- It is not helpful or fair to blame your partner if you have HPV.

Having an open conversation with your partner about HPV is important, so you are both informed and can both make safe decisions about your health.

Making Sense of Cervical Cancer Screening

What screening tests are done for cervical cancer?
There are two main kinds of screening tests:
- The Pap test
- The HPV test

What is the Pap test?
The Pap test is used to look for abnormal cervical cells.
- Pap tests are often done during the pelvic exam portion of a well-woman visit (see Stay Healthy section of this brochure).
- During a Pap test, your healthcare provider will collect a sample of cervical cells for analysis by a laboratory.
- About 90% of Pap test results are normal.
- If the test result is abnormal, you may need more tests.
- In most cases an abnormal Pap result does not mean that a woman has cancer.

What is the HPV test?
The HPV test is a very accurate way to tell if high-risk HPV is present in a woman’s cervix.
- This test can use the same sample of cells taken for the Pap test or a separate sample taken right after the Pap.
- A positive result means a woman has high-risk HPV. She should be followed closely to make sure the infection goes away and that she does not develop abnormal cells.
- A positive HPV test result does not mean that a woman has cancer.
- Also, a positive HPV test result is not a sign that you or your partner had sex outside the relationship. A person can have HPV for a long time before it’s found.

When would an HPV test be done?
The HPV test is used in two ways:
- To see if a woman with a borderline Pap test result (one that shows unusual cells but not dysplasia) needs additional tests.
- To screen for cervical cancer, along with the Pap test, in women aged 30 or older. Women 30 or older who have HPV are more likely to have it a long time. That means they have a greater risk of developing cervical cancer.
- Women in their 20s don’t need an HPV test in addition to the Pap test. HPV infection is very common in this age group and usually goes away.
- The HPV test is not used for men. Most of the time, men don’t develop health problems from HPV.

When should women be screened for cervical cancer?
Experts recommend that a woman’s first Pap test be done by age 21 or three years after she becomes sexually active with vaginal intercourse—whichever is first.
- Women under age 30 should speak to their health care provider about how often to have a Pap test.
- Women age 30 or older can have an HPV test along with the Pap test. Women who have a normal Pap test result and a negative HPV test result should have both tests repeated in three years.
- Women age 70 or older should discuss with their health care provider whether or not to continue cervical cancer screening.
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus and cervix) that was not performed to treat cancer or dysplasia don’t need to be screened.

Screening tests for cervical cancer can be confusing. If you have any questions about the tests, talk to your health care provider.