LEEP Abnormal Pap

What is a Pap test?

The ***Pap test***, also called a Pap smear or cervical cytology screening, checks for abnormal changes in the cells of the ***cervix*** and allows early treatment so that abnormal cells do not become cancer.

What causes abnormal Pap test results?

The main cause of abnormal Pap test results is infection with ***human papillomavirus (HPV)***. There are many types of HPV. Some types have been linked to cancer of the cervix, ***vulva***, and vagina. Other types have been linked to genital warts.

What is the difference between the terms dysplasia, cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN), and squamous intraepithelial lesion (SIL)?

All of these terms are used to describe precancer changes in the cervix that occur as a result of HPV infection, but they are used in different situations.

Dysplasia and ***cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN)*** describe the actual changes that occur in the cervix. Dysplasia and CIN are graded as mild, moderate, or severe. Mild dysplasia (CIN 1) usually goes away on its own. Moderate (CIN 2) and severe (CIN 3) dysplasia indicate more serious changes.

The term ***squamous intraepithelial lesion*** is used by the Bethesda System for abnormal growth of cells on the surface of the cervix. "Squamous" refers to the type of cells that make up the tissue that covers the cervix.

What is the Bethesda System?

The Bethesda System is a list of terms used by labs to describe Pap test results. With the Bethesda System, your Pap test results will be placed in one of several groups:

- Normal (negative)—There are no signs of cancer or precancer.
- Atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance (ASC-US)—Changes in the cervical cells have been found. The changes are almost always a sign of an HPV infection but may indicate precancer is present. ASC-US is the most common abnormal Pap test result.
- Squamous intraepithelial lesion (SIL)—Abnormal changes are seen in the cells that may be a sign of precancer. SIL can be low grade (LSIL) or high grade (HSIL).
    - LSIL is mild or moderate dysplasia (CIN 1 and CIN 2). It almost always indicates that an HPV infection is present, but it also may indicate mild precancer changes. LSIL is very common and usually goes away on its own without treatment.
    - HSIL is severe dysplasia, either CIN 3 or carcinoma in situ (CIS). This result is most likely to progress to cancer.
- Atypical squamous cells, cannot exclude HSIL (ASC-H)—Changes in the cervical cells have been found. These changes are not clearly HSIL but could be. Further testing is needed.
- Atypical glandular cells (AGC)—Cell changes are seen that suggest precancer of the upper part of the cervix or uterus.

- Cancer—Abnormal cells may have spread deeper into the cervix or to other tissues.

When is further testing for abnormal Pap test results needed?

If you are told that you have an abnormal Pap test result, you may need further testing. The follow-up testing that you receive after an abnormal Pap test result depends on your age and the grade of dysplasia (see the following table). Sometimes, there is more than one option for further testing. You and your health care provider will discuss each option and decide which is best for you.