

# Cervical Cancer Screening: A Guide to Your Pap Test Results



**Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program**

[www.nscancercare.ca](http://www.nscancercare.ca)

# Cervical Cancer Screening: A Guide to Your Pap Test Results

## What is a Pap test?

A Pap test checks for cell changes on the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the uterus or womb and is at the top of the vagina. A Pap test of the vagina may also be done for some women.

During a Pap test, the doctor or nurse will brush off a few cells from the cervix, cervical canal, or vagina and place them on a slide.

The slide is then sent to the lab to be examined. It may take up to 12 weeks to receive your Pap test results.

## When your Pap results are abnormal:

Don't panic. Having an abnormal Pap result can mean many things. Most changes are minor. Very few women with an abnormal Pap test result have cancer. Follow-up testing is important and is a safeguard against future problems. You may need to see a specialist for more testing and possible treatment.

## What do your Pap results mean?

**Negative** - No abnormal cells are noted. Continue to have a regular Pap test.

**Negative with inflammation** - The Pap test is negative but cells show some irritation. More tests and treatment may be needed. The Pap test should be repeated after any infection has cleared.

**Unsatisfactory** - The Pap test is not readable. For example, the cervical cells may be hidden by blood. The Pap test should be repeated in 6-12 weeks.

**ASC-US\*** - Abnormal cells of uncertain significance are noted. The Pap test should be repeated in 6 months. If it is still abnormal, your doctor will refer you to colposcopy.

What are your questions? Please ask.  
We are here to help you.

**ASC-H\***- Abnormal cells are noted and high grade changes cannot be ruled out. Your doctor will refer you to colposcopy for further testing. Low grade and high grade changes are abnormal changes that happen well before cancer. They refer to changes in the size, shape, and number of cells that form the surface of the cervix. They are sometimes called pre-cancer changes or dysplasia.

**AGC\***- Cells that line the cervical canal, called glandular cells, are abnormal. Your doctor will refer you to colposcopy for more testing.

**LSIL\***- Abnormal cells called low grade changes are noted. The Pap test should be repeated in 6 months. If still abnormal, your doctor will refer you for colposcopy.

**HSIL\***- Abnormal cells called high grade changes are noted. Your doctor will refer you to colposcopy for more testing.

**AIS\***- High grade changes are noted in the glandular cells. These are the cells that line the cervical canal. Your doctor will refer you to colposcopy for more testing.

**HSIL-S\***- High grade cell changes are noted that are suspicious for cancer. This result is rare. Your doctor will refer you to colposcopy for more testing.

**Positive for Carcinoma**- Some of the cells appear cancerous. This result is rare. Your doctor will refer you to colposcopy for more testing.

### **What is colposcopy?**

Col-pos-co-py is a close examination of the cervix and vagina. The doctor uses a special microscope called a colposcope, to have a close look at these areas for possible abnormal cells.

Colposcopy is similar to a Pap test and takes only a few minutes to do. It may be a little uncomfortable, but is not normally painful.

During examination, a biopsy or tissue sample may be taken. This sample is then sent to the lab for analysis.

### **Where do I go for colposcopy?**

Your doctor will refer you to a gynecologist who is specially trained in colposcopy for this test. It is available in many areas of Nova Scotia.

### **After colposcopy**

After colposcopy the doctor will talk to you about your results. He or she will let you know if another colposcopy visit or perhaps a treatment is needed. The doctor will also let you know when you can return to your health care provider for regular Pap testing.

## Questions or Concerns?

If you have any questions or concerns about your Pap test results and follow-up testing, talk to your health care provider. If you have any questions about the information in this brochure, talk to your doctor or call the Cervical Cancer Prevention Program at 1-888-480-8588.

You may also call the Canadian Cancer Society's Cancer Information Service at 1-888-939-3333 for more information about Pap tests.

## Glossary

- \*ASC-US – Atypical Squamous Cells of Undetermined Significance.
- \*ASC-H – Atypical Squamous Cells-Cannot Exclude High Grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion.
- \*AGC – Atypical Glandular Cells.
- \*LSIL – Low grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion.
- \*HSIL – High grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion.
- \*AIS – Adenocarcinoma In Situ.
- \*HSIL-S – High grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion-Suspicious.

## For more information:

Contact the Cervical Cancer Prevention Program (Nova Scotia Health Authority Cancer Care Program) at [www.nscancercare.ca](http://www.nscancercare.ca) or 1-888-480-8588.

### Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>  
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.  
For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.  
If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.