



#41 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues

interest to all New Yorkers



## Pap Tests Save Lives

### Get Checked for Cervical Cancer!

- Cancer of the cervix (the lower end of the uterus) develops slowly and usually causes no symptoms.
- Regular Pap tests can *prevent* cervical cancer by finding cells that can be treated before they become cancer. Pap tests can also find signs of cancer early to prevent it from spreading.
- Pap tests are recommended every 1 to 3 years.
- If you have an abnormal Pap test, it is essential to get follow-up tests and treatment.
- ***If all women who need Pap tests got them, almost all deaths from cervical cancer could be prevented.***



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## What Is a Pap Test?

As part of a routine pelvic exam, your gynecologist or other health care provider takes a small sample from the cervix for examination at a laboratory.

## Who Should Get Pap Tests?

- Pap tests are recommended every 1 to 3 years starting at age 21 (or within 3 years of beginning sexual activity, whichever comes first). How often depends on your risk factors and past test results.
- A woman over 65 may no longer need Pap tests if recent tests have been normal and she is not at higher risk for cervical cancer.
- A woman who has had a total hysterectomy (removal of both the uterus *and* the cervix) no longer needs Pap tests, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer or pre-cancer.



## Risk Factors for Cervical Cancer

- Most cervical cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection. Some physicians are testing for HPV as an alternative to a Pap test.
- Make sure your doctor knows if you have any of these other *risk* factors:
  - Had cervical cancer in the past.
  - Have had sex with multiple partners (or had a partner who has).
  - Have had a sexually transmitted infection.
  - Smoke cigarettes.
  - Have a weakened immune system (for example, if you are HIV-positive or being treated for any type of cancer).

## Reducing Your Risk

**Regular Pap or HPV tests—and a new HPV vaccine (*Gardasil*) approved for ages 9 to 26—are the most reliable ways to prevent cervical cancer.**

### **In addition:**

- Safer sex may reduce your risk of cervical cancer (by reducing your exposure to HPV).
- Limiting your number of sex partners and using a latex condom every time can help protect you from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, including HPV.
- Quitting smoking reduces the risk of cervical and many other cancers. For free help, call 311 and ask for the Smokers' Quitline.
- Get a Pap or HPV test from your gynecologist or other health care provider.





- Pap tests are covered by most insurance plans. If you don't have health insurance, you may be eligible for free or low-cost screenings. Call 311 for more information.
- New York State has cervical cancer screening programs for low-income women who are uninsured or under-insured. For information, call 311 or visit: [www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/cancer/center/partnership.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/cancer/center/partnership.htm)
- Pap tests, HIV tests, and exams and treatment for other sexually transmitted diseases are available free at Health Department STD clinics, regardless of income or immigration status. The consent of a partner or parent is NOT required (even for teenagers under 18). Call 311 for the clinic nearest you.

### More Information

- **NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** [nyc.gov/health/tcny](http://nyc.gov/health/tcny) or call 311
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp)
- **National Cancer Institute:** [www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/types/cervical](http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/types/cervical)
- **American Cancer Society:** [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) or call 1-800-ACS-2345 (1-800-227-2345)
- **National Cervical Cancer Coalition:** [www.nccc-online.org](http://www.nccc-online.org) or call 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)
- **Gynecologic Cancer Foundation:** [www.thegcf.org](http://www.thegcf.org)

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# Pap tests save lives



Pap tests can *prevent* cervical cancer



Reduce your risk for cervical cancer



Get a Pap test every 1-3 years



# Health Bulletin

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

#41 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

## New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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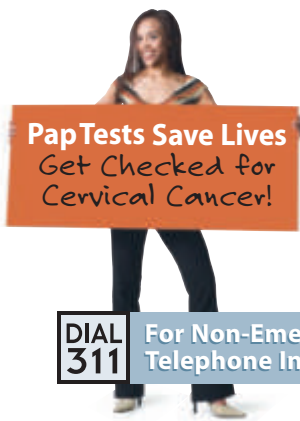
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