Abnormal Pap Smear

The Pap smear is a screening test used to detect cervical cancer or cellular changes which, if disregarded, might develop into cervical cancer. The cells in the specimen collected during your pelvic exam are examined and classified as normal (negative) or abnormal. The abnormal cells are further described according to how they appear. These changes on the Pap smear are frequently associated with HPV (Human Papilloma Virus). HPV (which sometimes causes genital warts) is frequently first seen on the Pap smear. This finding may occur even if no warts are visible during the exam.

**Descriptive diagnosis of Pap smears:**

1. Epithelial Cell Abnormalities:
   - SCUS - atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance. These are cells which appear abnormal but the cause is unclear. You will be advised to have an HPV test or to repeat the Pap smear in four to six months.
   - SIL - squamous intraepithelial lesion. This describes abnormalities in the cell which could be precancerous. This does not indicate cancer. SIL is further described as "low grade" or "high grade" (more advanced).
   - AGUS - atypical or atypical glandular cells of undetermined significance. This abnormality of the glandular cells of the endocervix should be further evaluated.

2. Infection with such organisms as yeast or Trichomonas may be detected by the Pap smear, but the Pap smear is NOT a screening test for infection. A normal Pap does not rule out infection.

3. Inflammation: This indicates the presence of white blood cells. Your clinician will decide if this is significant.

**How will we follow-up on your abnormal Pap smear?**

- Your clinician will call you and explain the results.
- Pap smears showing ASCUS with a positive HPV test or SIL or AGUS need to be followed up with a more sensitive, diagnostic exam called colposcopy. This procedure can be performed by an MD at the IUHC if you choose. Your clinician will explain this to you if it is recommended. Further information on colposcopy is included in this brochure.

**What causes an abnormal Pap smear?**

Your cervix is made up of tissue that is continuously changing. It changes in response to aging, sexual activity, infections, pregnancy, natural hormone variations and medical treatments. The adolescent female's cervix is especially susceptible to changes because it is still immature and not yet covered by the thick protective layer of cells that older women have. These immature cells may be more susceptible to the risk factors.

**What are some of the common risk factors for cervical cancer?**

- Smoking
- First sexual intercourse before age 18
- Multiple sexual partners
- HPV
- Sexual intercourse with men whose partners have had abnormal Pap smears or cervical cancer
- Sexual intercourse with men who have multiple partners or sexually transmitted diseases
- Exposure to DES (diethylstilbestrol) before birth

**Cervical Health - Self Help Suggestions**

- If you smoke, stop smoking--if you don't smoke, don't start.
- Anti-oxidants - ask your health care provider for current information.
- Use condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections.
- Keep follow-up appointments with your medical provider.

Your Pap smear is a valuable screening test and an important part of your health care. As many as 1 in 4 Pap smears may indicate some problem but these are usually easily treated. It is important that you understand your Pap smear results and your follow-up care. If you have any other questions, please contact your clinician or schedule an appointment (855-7688).
**Colposcopy**

A specialized test called a colposcopy may be recommended for you. It is an “in office” procedure that takes about 15 minutes. The cervix is examined with a special microscope which can determine specific areas of abnormal cells. Small biopsies (pieces of tissue) are taken from those areas. In most cases the tissue biopsy will allow a reliable diagnosis of the condition.

After biopsies have been checked by the pathologist, your clinician will discuss with you the results and the best treatment.

Once several normal Pap smears are obtained following the treatment, chances for recurrence are no greater than for those who have had continuous normal Pap smears. The colposcopy is done by an MD with special training in the procedure. It can be scheduled at the Health Center or with your own provider.