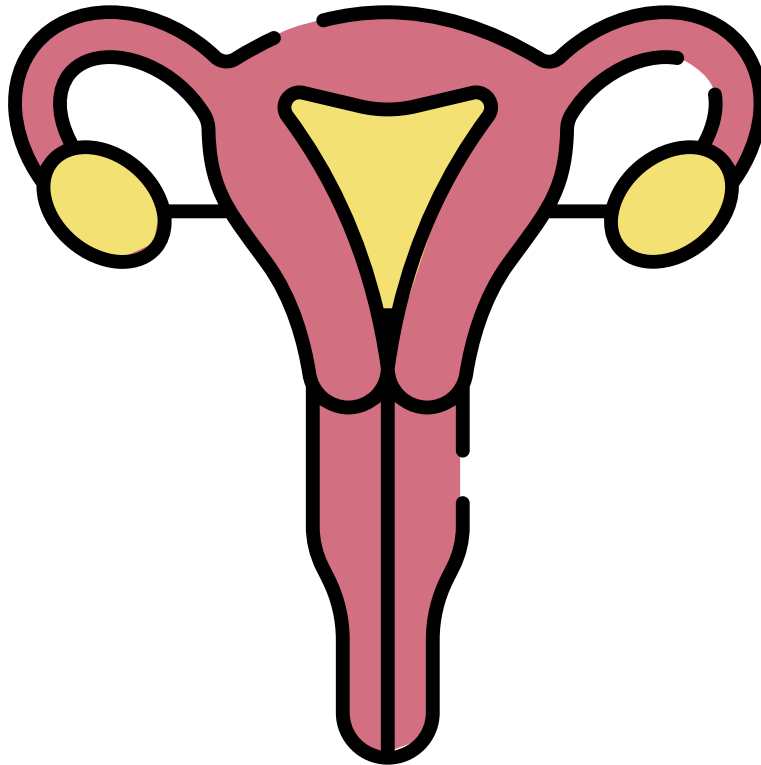


Cervical Cancer



This information sheet is about ways you can reduce your risk of cervical cancer.

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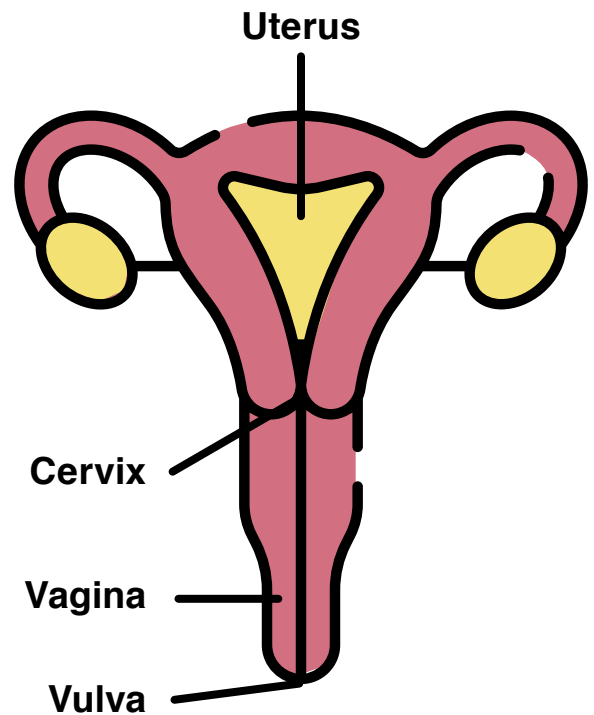
Cervical cancer

Anyone with a cervix can get cervical cancer.

The cervix is a donut-shaped organ that connects your uterus and vagina. The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus. The uterus (or womb) is an organ that is shaped like a pear and is the size of a small fist. The vagina is shaped like a tube and it connects the uterus and cervix to the vulva. The vulva includes the outer parts of your genitals such as the labia, clitoris, and the urethral opening (i.e., the hole you pee out of).

Cervical cancer primarily impacts the cervix, but it can also spread to the uterus, vulva, and vagina.

Cervical cancer is serious. Every year, more than 1000 Canadians will get cervical cancer. About 400 of them will die from cervical cancer.



**But cervical cancer can be prevented.
Cervical cancer can also be treated if it is found early.**

HPV and cancer

Human papillomavirus (HPV) causes most cervical cancers.

What is HPV?



HPV is a sexually transmitted infection. Sexually transmitted infections are infections that get passed from one person to another person during sex. People can get HPV from skin-to-skin contact during sex, such as when the vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, throat, or anus comes into contact with another person's genitals, mouth, or throat, typically during sexual activity. It can spread without ejaculation or penetration of the penis into the vagina, anus, or mouth.

Because HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact, condoms can lower the risk of HPV, but they do not protect against HPV entirely.

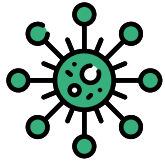
HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection. Most people who have sex (and do not get the HPV vaccine before they become sexually active) will get HPV at least once in their life.



Most people who have HPV do not have symptoms and do not know they have HPV.

What is HPV?

Usually, HPV will not cause any health problems and will go away by itself.



But, sometimes, HPV can cause health problems like:

- **Cancer.** HPV can cause cervical cancer and cancer in other parts of the body like the throat, vagina, vulva, penis, or anus.
- **Warts on the genitals.** HPV can cause warts on parts of the body like the vagina, penis, and anus. Warts are small, skin-coloured bumps that can look like cauliflower.



It can take many years for cells infected with HPV to develop into cancer.



People of all gender identities and sexual orientations can get HPV.

It is important that everyone protect themselves from HPV.

How to protect yourself from getting HPV

1. Get the HPV vaccine

Getting the HPV vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and people you have sex with from HPV.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is a vaccine you can get from a health care provider. This vaccine involves 1 to 3 doses (typically 6 months apart).

For more information on vaccine doses, check out the Government of Canada's [HPV Vaccine Guide](#).

Why is the HPV vaccine important?



The HPV vaccine prevents genital warts and cancers that are caused by HPV (like cervical cancer).

The HPV vaccine can prevent over 90% of cancers caused by HPV.



If you do not get the vaccine and you are having sex, there is a high chance you will get HPV at some point in your life.

Even if you do not develop health problems from HPV, **you can still pass HPV to another person.**

Getting the HPV vaccine protects you and the people you have sex with.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

In Canada, it is recommended that everyone between the ages of 9 and 26 get the HPV vaccine. People who are older than 26 may also be encouraged to get the HPV vaccine. Speak to your health care provider if you would like to get the HPV vaccine.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?



Yes, it is very safe.



Most people will have no side effects when they get the HPV vaccine.

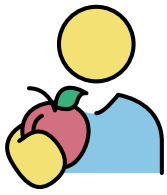


Sometimes, people might feel a bit of pain, redness, or swelling in the area where they got the vaccine. But these symptoms will usually go away in a few days.



In a very small number of cases, people might have an allergic reaction, or they might faint after getting the HPV vaccine.

How to get the HPV vaccine?



All provinces and territories offer free HPV vaccine programs in schools for students. If your school offers the HPV vaccine for your grade, **get the vaccine when the program happens at your school.**



If you cannot get the HPV vaccine at school, **ask your doctor or pharmacist about other HPV vaccine programs that might exist in your province or territory.**

For example: British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba have HPV vaccine programs for certain groups of people. For example: men who have sex with men, people living with HIV, and transgender people.



It is also possible to get the HPV vaccine at a doctor's office or a pharmacy and pay for it. The vaccine can cost between \$510 and \$630.

If you have private insurance or are on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) the vaccine might be partially or fully covered. **Check with your insurance company or case worker to see if the cost of the vaccine is covered.**



For more information about the HPV vaccine programs in each province and territory, check out the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer's HPV [vaccine access map](#).

2. Get regular cervical cancer screenings

Cervical cancer screenings are for anyone with a cervix. The screenings help to find cervical cancer in a person early so that the cervical cancer can be treated before it becomes serious.

There are 2 ways to screen for cervical cancer:

- Papanicolaou test or **Pap test**
- HPV testing

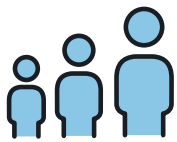
Pap test



Right now, the Pap test is the main cervical cancer screening used in Canada.



Pap tests are used to look for cells in the cervix that can become cancer.

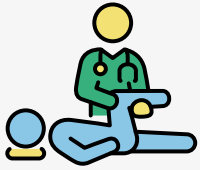


Each province and territory in Canada have guidelines for when a person with a cervix should get a Pap test.

Usually, people start to get the Pap test at 21- or 25-years-old until 65- to 70-years-old. Once people start getting the Pap test, they should get it every 2 or 3 years.

Ask your health care provider when you should get a Pap test and how often.

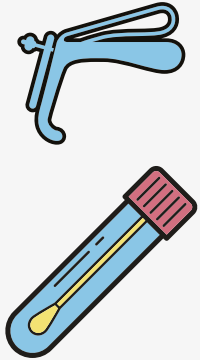
Pap test



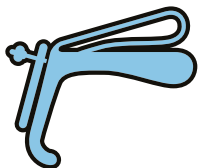
The Pap test is usually done by a doctor or nurse at a health clinic.

To do the Pap test:

1. The doctor or nurse will ask you to lie on your back with your legs open.
2. The doctor or nurse will use a tool called a speculum to open your vagina so they can see your cervix.
3. The doctor or nurse will then use a small soft brush to take some cells from your cervix.

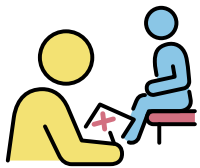


There is a resource on the Disability and Sexuality Lab website that tells you more about what to expect when you get a Pap test: <https://www.disabilitysexualitylab.com/work/resources-for-service-providers>

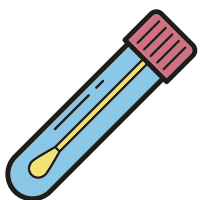


For some disabled people, it can be difficult or uncomfortable to get the speculum into the vagina.

If your disability may impact your doctor/nurse putting a speculum into your vagina (for example if you have spasticity), let them know ahead of time. If you are worried about having a speculum put into your vagina, you can ask your doctor/nurse if you can have a longer appointment or if a smaller speculum can be used.



It is also important to let your doctor/nurse know about areas around your cervix, vagina, and vulva that are sensitive for you.

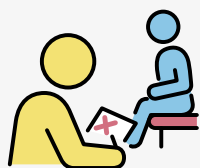
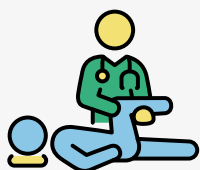


You can also ask your doctor/nurse if you can do HPV testing instead.

Pap test

It is important to advocate for yourself if you are able to, for example you can ask your health care provider for accommodations to make your Pap test more accessible and comfortable. This could include asking your health care provider about alternative positioning or using a numbing gel or a painkiller (e.g., Advil or Tylenol) ahead of time.

Here are some things you can say to a health care provider when you are getting a Pap test:



- I would prefer you to walk me through everything you are doing.
- I need help getting up on the examination table and getting my feet into the stirrups.
- I can't get up onto the examination table, what other options are available?
- This positioning is painful/uncomfortable, what other options are available?
- I may need a little extra time to get into position and/or process the information.
- I brought a list of questions and concerns I have.
- Please explain the procedure/results in a slow and clear manner. Please provide me with step-by-step instructions.
- I have asked a trusted friend/family member to join me during our visit to help me get into position and/or process or remember the information.
- I would prefer for you to list all the options available.
- I am a little sensitive down there, can you please use numbing gel?
- I'd like to ask for a second opinion on this procedure/medication, can you please refer me to a specialist?

It can be difficult to advocate for yourself, but it is important because you know your body best and you have the right to be involved in decision-making about your health.

If you are intersex or transgender and do not know if you need cervical cancer screening, talk to a health care provider you trust.



HPV testing



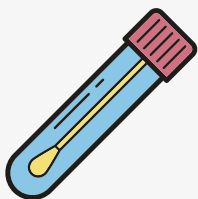
Some provinces and territories have plans to make HPV testing the main cervical cancer screening (instead of the Pap test).



HPV testing is used to look for HPV in cervical cells that could lead to cancer.



A speculum is not needed for HPV testing. This can make HPV testing more accessible.



For HPV testing, a doctor or nurse will put a small soft brush into your vagina and turn it for 15 to 20 seconds. The brush does not have to touch your cervix so it does not have to go very deep into your vagina.

Let your doctor/nurse know about areas around your vagina and vulva that are sensitive for you.

HPV testing

In British Columbia, you can do the HPV testing by yourself in your home. This is called cervix self-screening. Here is a video that tells you how to do the cervix self-screening: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr3rEAr8vm8&t=10s&ab_channel=ScreeningBC



If you live in British Columbia and want to do the cervix self-screening, you can fill out an online form to get a kit sent to you (<https://submit.healthcarebc.ca/bccancer/cervix-screening-kit>) or you can call 1-877-702-6566 to get more information.

Here is a link for more information about cervix self-screening: <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/screening/cervix/how-it-works/what-is-cervix-self-screening>

Disabled people may experience barriers to getting cancer screenings

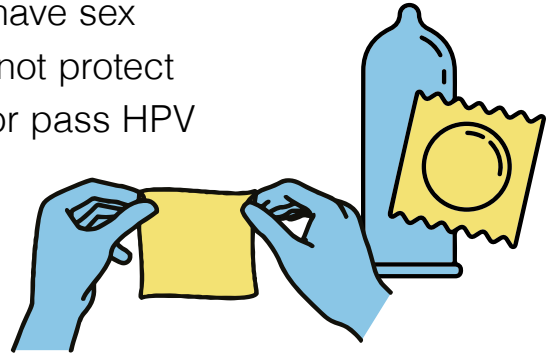
- Health care facilities are not always physically accessible.
- Cervical cancer screenings for HPV might not be done in an accessible way.
- Some health care providers might think that disabled people do not need cancer screenings. This may be because some health care providers might think that disabled people are unlikely to have sex. It can be helpful to ask your health care provider what they know about your disability to see if they are the right health care provider for you.
- People might not know what kind of cancer screenings they need.



This makes getting the HPV vaccine even more important.

3. Use a condom or dental dam when you have sex

Using a condom or dental dam every time you have sex can reduce your chances of getting HPV. It will not protect you completely, because you can still get HPV or pass HPV to another person through skin-to-skin contact from areas that the condom does not cover. Still, using a condom or dental dam will help reduce your risk.



Some disabled people (like people with spina bifida) have latex allergies and should use non-latex condoms/dental dams.

Check out [Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections: Information Sheet](#) for more information about protecting yourself from getting or passing a sexually transmitted infection and ways to talk to your partner(s) about using condoms or dental dams.

