WHEN DO I NEED A Pap test AND HPV test?

A Pap test is a screening procedure that requires removing some cells from the cervix (lower portion of the uterus). A health care provider does this during a pelvic exam. These cells are then sent to a lab for review.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) test detects the presence of this virus in cervical cells removed during a pelvic exam. If HPV is detected in cervical cells, the woman is at risk of developing genital warts, abnormal cervical cells or cervical cancer.

Recommendations for screening:

Under age 21: No screening indicated even in sexually active women

Age 21 to 29:

- Pap test alone every 3 years
- HPV NOT recommended unless PAP was abnormal

Age 30 to 65:
Do one of the following:

- Co-testing (PAP + HPV) every 5 years (preferred)
- HPV testing (alone) every 5 years
- PAP test alone every 3 years

Over age 65: Discontinue screening unless there is a history of prior abnormal cervical cells

Post- hysterectomy: No screening is necessary unless there is a history of cervical cancer or prior abnormal cervical cells

Your doctor can advise on the recommended schedule of Pap/HPV tests based on your age, medical and family history and other risk factors. Key risk factors for cervical cancer include: persistent HPV infection, early onset of sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, smoking, and long term use of birth control pills (over 5 years). Follow your doctor's advice regarding Pap and HPV tests if you have risk factors for cervical cancer.

If you are experiencing unusual symptoms or have questions about Pap or HPV tests, cervical cancer screenings or any medical condition, talk to your doctor.

This health alert is brought to you by:

TPA THE PHYSICIAN ALLIANCE

Source: ChoosingWisely.org; American Academy of Family Physicians, American Cancer Society, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology

These items are provided solely for informational purposes and are not intended as a substitute for consultation with a medical professional. Patients with any specific questions about the items on this list or their individual health should consult their physician. 2025.