

## **What is a papsmear?**

A papsmear is a screening test to detect cervical cancer. It is also referred to as a 'papanicolaou test', a 'pap', or a 'smear' test. This test was first described by a Greek physician, Dr Georgios Papanicolaou. Since cervical cancer can be treated it is important that every women have this test, which is a simple and quick test.

### **The procedure:**

After your consent, your gynaecologist will insert a speculum (either plastic or metal) into the vagina to visualize the cervix. Then a soft brush /wooden spatula will be inserted and placed onto the cervix and rotated through 360 degrees to sample cells. The sample is then sent off to the pathologist to examine the cells for any abnormality under a microscope. The report is usually available within a 2-3 days, if not urgent. Performing a papsmear is not painful, but you might experience some discomfort especially if it is your first time. You can expect to be contacted if there are any abnormalities noted.

### **Preparing for the pap test:**

1. Avoid inserting any creams/ jelly substances a few day before
2. Avoid douching a few days before the visit
3. If you are on your period/menses (heavy flow days), then consider to re-schedule the visit

### **What can a papsmear show?**

- Inflammation
- Infection
- Cellular abnormalities, suggestive of precancer cells. In this case you might be contacted to come in for a HPV test, and/or a detailed examination of the cervix with a colposcope, which is a magnifying device.
- Cervical cancer

**How often should you have a papsmear?**

Depending on the results of the first papsmear, you will be guided by your healthcare provider. If there are no abnormalities, and the last 3 papsmears have been normal, then it is recommended to have a papsmear atleast every year until age 30, thereafter you will be guided by your gynaecologist. You may require more frequent testing if there are abnormalities.

**When should you begin having a papsmear?**

It is generally recommended to begin having papsmears when you become sexually active and/or at age 21.

**When can you stop having a pap test?**

Provided all the previous pap tests were normal, you may stop from age 65 onwards after a discussion with your health care provider.

**What causes cervical cancer?**

Human papilloma virus is the cause. Currently you may be offered to test for this virus, since it is the high risk types that cause cellular changes. The HPV test can be done concurrently with the pap test, and is referred to as a 'dual ' test.