



Remember,  
regular Pap tests  
are the best way to  
prevent cervical  
cancer.

## Information on you and your privacy

VCS appreciates that it holds sensitive personal health information. We have strict confidentiality practices in place to protect your privacy.

### How is this personal information collected?

This is collected from a practitioner who orders your test. If you provide information directly to us, this may be entered on your record as well.

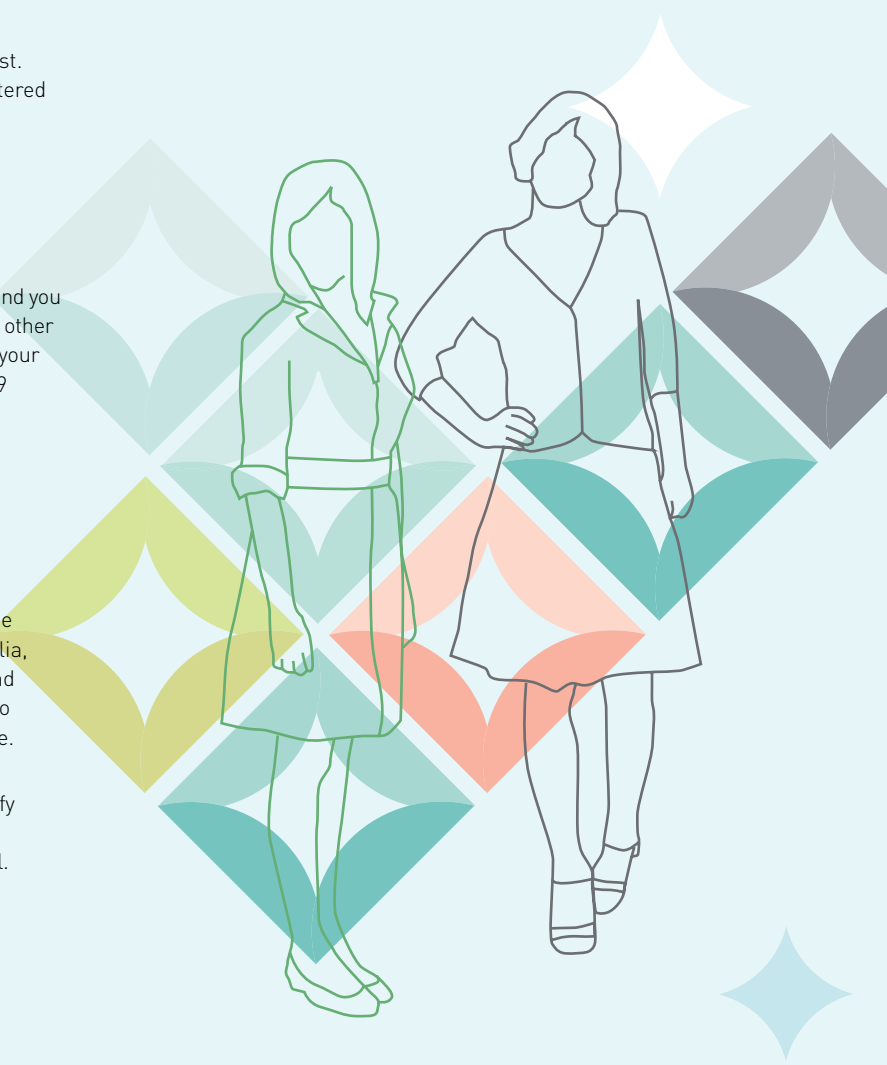
### How may personal information be used?

- Your personal information may be used for:
- Reporting the test ordered
  - Charging for services (where applicable)
  - The Victorian Cervical Cytology Registry (VCCR) to remind you or your practitioner if you are overdue for a Pap test or other test. You can get more information about VCCR from your practitioner or by telephoning VCCR on (03) 9250 0399 or accessing their website at [www.vccr.org](http://www.vccr.org).
  - Research to improve our knowledge, particularly on how to prevent cancer of the cervix. No research information identifies an individual person.

### Does my information have to be provided to Medicare Australia?

In order for the National Cervical Screening Programme to develop an accurate picture of Pap smears in Australia, VCS sends information (name, address, date of birth and Medicare number) to Medicare Australia. This is done to monitor and improve the cervical screening programme. However, the choice is yours. If you do not want your information to be sent to Medicare Australia, please notify us by email at [director@vcs.org.au](mailto:director@vcs.org.au) or write to us (details below). We will still report your Pap test as usual. Our full privacy policy can be viewed on our website [www.vcs.org.au](http://www.vcs.org.au) or may be obtained by telephoning VCS on (03) 9250 0300.

# Pap tests and you. Quality matters.



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## What is a Pap test?

A Pap test looks for changes in the cells of the cervix (the lower part of the uterus). These changes are almost always caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) and are usually not serious. However if left over many years they could develop into cervical cancer. Finding these changes early means they can usually be treated before anything serious happens.

A Pap test is not a check for ovarian cancer or for sexually transmitted infections.



## Who should have Pap tests?

All women who have ever been sexually active should have Pap tests every two years from age 18, or two years after first sexual activity (whichever is later), and continue until age 70.

Women who are no longer sexually active or who have been in one relationship for a long time should still have Pap tests. This is because cell changes may take many years to develop. Some women who have had a hysterectomy still need Pap tests. Ask your doctor if you're not sure.

If you have any symptoms such as unusual bleeding or pain in the pelvic area, see your doctor, even if your last Pap test was normal.

## The human papillomavirus (HPV)

HPV is a very common virus which usually has no symptoms and is cleared from the body naturally. Occasionally it causes serious disease.

Genital HPV is spread through genital skin-to-genital skin contact. Both men and women can be infected with this virus.

Many HPV types affect the genital area (this includes the cervix). A few of these types ("high-risk") have the potential to cause cervical cancer.

If women have a persistent infection with one of the "high-risk" HPV types, changes may develop over many years into cancer. If found early these cell changes can be treated and cancer prevented.

## Pap tests after the cervical cancer (HPV) vaccine

Even if you have had the cervical cancer vaccine, you should continue to have Pap tests every two years. This is because the vaccine only protects against two of the "high-risk" HPV types. Although these two types cause the majority of cervical cancers, you could be infected with other high-risk types. This is why Pap tests are still recommended after vaccination.

More information is available at [www.cervicalcancervaccine.org.au](http://www.cervicalcancervaccine.org.au)

**Your best protection is to have Pap tests every 2 years or as directed by your doctor or nurse.**

## What do the results mean?

A **negative** report means no significant changes were seen in the cells. Another Pap test in two years time is generally recommended.

A report of **low-grade abnormalities** means minor changes were found. These changes are common and often just disappear. Another Pap test in 12 months is usually recommended, or sometimes further tests are advised.

A report of **high-grade abnormalities** means there are changes that your doctor will need to investigate further. A colposcopy is generally needed; your doctor can explain what this involves.

An **unsatisfactory** test result occurs when the cells cannot be properly examined, or the sample of the cells is too small. There are a number of reasons why this may happen. These are mostly out of the control of the person who performed the test or the laboratory that examined it. Another Pap test 6 to 12 weeks later is generally recommended.

## How accurate is a Pap test?

Like all screening tests, the Pap test is not 100% accurate. This is due to a variety of reasons. For example, the test may not always include abnormal cells even if these are present on your cervix. Some tests can be hard to interpret or there may be abnormal cells which are not seen at the time of screening.

However with regular Pap tests, more than 90% of cases of squamous cancer of the cervix can be prevented. Squamous cancer is the most common type of cervical cancer. Other rarer types of cervical cancer are usually not able to be prevented by regular Pap tests.

## What is the Pap test Registry?

The registry is a confidential database of Victorian women's Pap test results. The Registry's formal name is the Victorian Cervical Cytology Registry (VCCR).

If your results are being forwarded to the Pap Test Registry, please remember to notify them on (03) 9250 0399 of any change of address during the next three years. This will allow them to post your reminder letter to the correct address. Alternatively you can update your address on their website [www.vccr.org](http://www.vccr.org). Having regular Pap tests is an important way to stay healthy.

