

## Abnormal Cervical Cancer Screening Result (Abnormal Pap Test Result)

### What does an abnormal cervical cancer screening result mean?

Results from the cervical cancer screening procedure are usually normal — indicating that no precancerous or cancerous cells were detected. If the results are normal, no immediate action is needed and future cervical cancer screenings are recommended every 3-5 years. If the test results are abnormal, a health care provider will discuss what type of abnormal cells were found and any recommended next steps. If abnormal cells are detected, it does not mean that a person has cervical cancer.

### How will I be informed of my cervical cancer screening results?

For those who had their Pap test done at Medical Services, a health care provider will either call or send a secure message through the electronic medical records system regarding the need to discuss cervical cancer screening results in person. The discussion will typically include more information about the specific screening results and the recommended next steps.

### What action is recommended after receiving abnormal cervical cancer screening results?

The cervical cancer screening allows detection of any abnormal cells on the cervix and indicates when more observation or treatment of those abnormal cells is needed. Typically, cervical cancer develops slowly over a number of years. Any abnormal cells will be monitored for a return to normal or a progression to becoming more abnormal, including pre-cancerous or cancerous cells. The observation of these cells may include a repeat cervical cancer screening with or without testing for human papillomavirus (HPV), after 6 to 12 months.

### Can I receive follow-up care at Medical Services?

Not all follow-up screenings and treatments are available at Medical Services. If the provider indicates that further action or treatment is needed beyond repeated cervical cancer screenings, they will provide a referral for an appointment with an OB/GYN or gynecology specialist for this additional evaluation and treatment. Sometimes, a colposcopy is the recommended next step. During that procedure, an instrument is used to provide a magnified view of the cervical cells and identify the precise location of any abnormal cells on the cervix. The provider may also take a sample of any tissue that appears to be abnormal and send it to the laboratory for further analysis. Students who visit a specialist for care outside of Medical Services and have the Columbia Health Student Insurance plan may be charged a copay for an office visit and a co-insurance charge associated with any labs and treatment.

### What else do I need to know about abnormal cervical cancer screening results?

Cervical cancer develops over a number of years. It can be detected and treated early with regular screenings as recommended by a health care provider. Cervical cancer and changes to cervical cells are often caused by an HPV infection. A person who has an HPV infection or abnormal cervical cells will typically feel fine and have no symptoms related to the infection or the abnormal cells. This makes regular cervical cancer screenings critical for early detection, diagnosis, and treatment. It may also be an opportunity to speak with a health care provider about additional ways to reduce risk of cervical cancer, including getting the HPV vaccine (Gardasil-9) and using condoms.

### Online & Off-Campus Resources

Go Ask Alice!: [goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://goaskalice.columbia.edu)

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG)  
Patient Information: [acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Patient-Education-FAQs-List](http://acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Patient-Education-FAQs-List)

Columbia Student Health Insurance Plan Information:  
[health.columbia.edu/content/about-columbia-university-student-health-insurance-plan](http://health.columbia.edu/content/about-columbia-university-student-health-insurance-plan)

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Columbia Health

### On-Campus Resources

Medical Services: 212-854-7426  
[health.columbia.edu/medical-services](http://health.columbia.edu/medical-services)

Gay Health Advocacy Project (GHAP): 212-854-6655  
[health.columbia.edu/GHAP](http://health.columbia.edu/GHAP)

Columbia Health Insurance Office: 212-854-7210  
[health.columbia.edu/insurance](http://health.columbia.edu/insurance)

[health.columbia.edu](http://health.columbia.edu)

212-854-2284