



IMPORTANCE OF PAP SMEARS AND HPV TESTS

A step in time

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable yet serious health concerns affecting women worldwide. Regular screening through Pap smears and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) testing plays a crucial role in early detection and prevention, significantly reducing both incidence and mortality.

What is a Pap Smear?

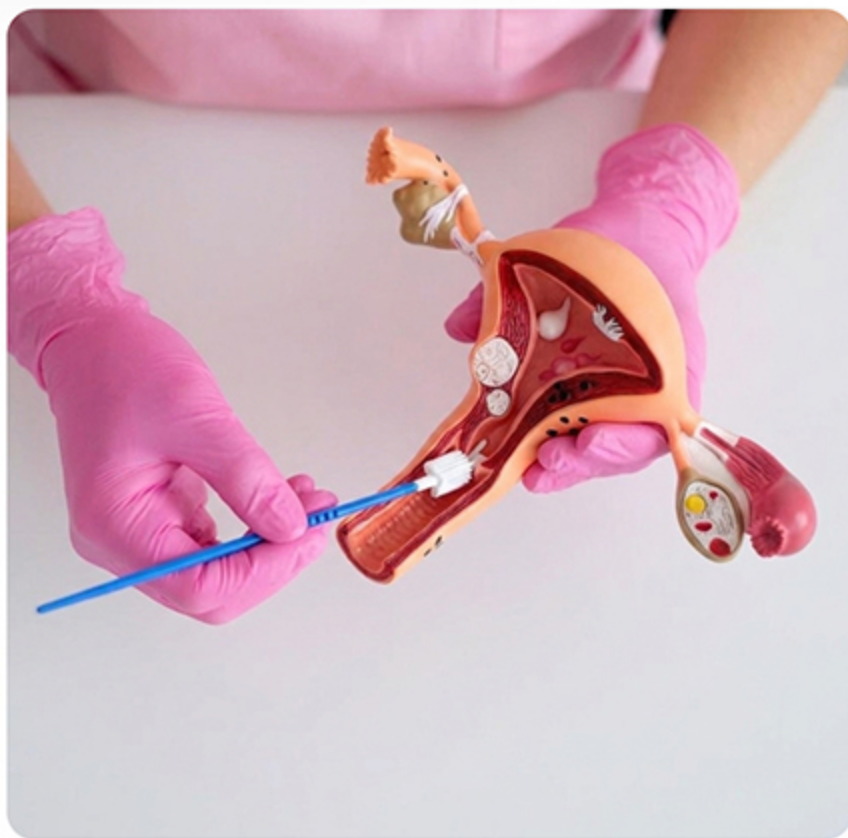
A Pap smear, also known as a Pap test, is a simple and quick procedure used to detect abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. These changes, if left untreated, can develop into cervical cancer over time.

In this test cells are collected from the cervix and examined under a microscope. What makes Pap smears particularly valuable is their ability to identify precancerous conditions before they progress into cancer, allowing timely intervention.

What is HPV Testing?

HPV testing detects the presence of high-risk strains of the Human Papillomavirus, which is the primary cause of most cervical cancers. HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection, and while many infections resolve on their own, persistent infection with high-risk types can lead to cervical cell changes and cancer. HPV testing is often recommended for women above 30 years of age, either alone or in combination with a Pap smear (co-testing).

The combined use of Pap smear and HPV testing enhances the effectiveness of screening programmes. While the Pap test identifies abnormal cell changes, the HPV test helps determine the underlying cause. This dual approach ensures early detection, better monitoring and appropriate follow-up care.



Importance of regular screening

Regular screening is essential even for women who feel healthy or have no symptoms, as early stages of cervical cancer often do not present noticeable signs. It is generally recommended that women begin Pap smear screening from their early 20s and continue at regular intervals as advised by their healthcare provider.

In addition to screening, preventive measures such as HPV vaccination, safe sexual practices and awareness about reproductive health help reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

To sum up, Pap smears and HPV tests are powerful tools in women's healthcare. They not only help detect early warning signs but also provide an opportunity to prevent cervical cancer altogether. **Regular screening must be prioritised to save lives and ensure long-term well-being.**