

Pap Smear Q&A

What is a Pap smear?

A Pap smear is a gentle and painless procedure when done by experienced specialists here at Capital Women's Care DC. At most, the patient feels slight discomfort as the doctor scrapes a few cells from the cervix for testing. The goal is to look for abnormalities that can indicate cervical cancer.

Not all abnormal Pap smears mean there is cancer, but an unusual result does indicate that further testing is needed. Abnormal cells are categorized by level, such as:

- Atypia
- Low grade dysplasia
- High grade dysplasia
- Atypical dysplasia
- Carcinoma in situ

A test that indicates mild abnormalities might just mean that the patient needs to get more frequent Pap smears done to monitor the cervical tissue for further changes. For a higher level of dysplasia, a specialist at Capital Women's Care might recommend a colposcopy to rule out cancer.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy allows a GYN specialist to take a closer look at the vagina, vulva, and cervix using a special instrument called a colposcope, which is similar to a large microscope. This exam allows for a biopsy of suspicious tissue, too, for examination by a pathologist to rule out cervical cancer.

What can a patient expect from a Pap smear?

This screening test occurs as part of a routine wellness check that includes a pelvic exam. The patient lies on her back with her heels in the stirrups to give the doctor access to the cervix.

The doctor inserts a speculum into the vagina, and they take a few sample cells from the cervix. They then send those cells to a lab for testing.

The Pap smear test is fast and painless for most women. There is slight pressure, but the procedure doesn't last more than a few seconds. Afterwards, someone at Capital Women's Care will get back to you with the results of the test.

If there are abnormal cells, you might need to make another appointment to discuss the test and consider a colposcopy.

There is no set time frame for getting the results of the test. It depends on the workload at the lab, but generally, the results come back quickly. Most of the time, there is nothing to worry about with a Pap smear.