

Pap and HPV testing at Obstetrics and Gynecology of Atlanta

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a common virus that infects the skin and mucous membranes. There are about 30 types of HPV that are spread through genital contact (typically sexual intercourse). Around half are "low-risk" types and can cause genital warts. The remainders are "high-risk" types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

It is estimated that 80 percent of all women will acquire one or more types of "genital" HPV at some point in their lives. Most of the time, the body's immune-defense system fights off or suppresses the HPV virus before it can cause problems. It is only when the infection persists that it can cause cells on the cervix to become abnormal and possibly cancerous. For these reasons, we start testing for persistent HPV infection in women over age 30.

Genital infection with the most common types of HPV can be prevented with the HPV vaccine. Vaccination is only fully effective if administered before a woman has been exposed to HPV through sexual contact. The vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. It is important to get a regular Pap test and – if you're over 30 – an HPV test, even if you've been vaccinated. A Pap test can identify abnormal cells, and the HPV test detects the presence of most types of high-risk HPV. Working together, they help make sure abnormal cells are diagnosed and treated early.

For women under age 30

Annual screening with a Pap test should begin approximately three years after a woman first engages in sexual intercourse, or at the age of 21 – whichever comes first. Until the age of 30, women should have annual Pap test. In this age group, we perform HPV testing for inconclusive or ASC-US Pap results. If testing shows they do not have HPV, a repeat Pap test is recommended in 12 months. If HPV is present, we recommend a colposcopy exam. Regardless of HPV results, any abnormal Pap test should be evaluated by colposcopy.

For women Age 30-65

Routine HPV testing, looking for persistent infection, at the time of the annual Pap test, is beneficial for women 30 and older. Women whose HPV test is negative and whose Pap test is normal do not need to be tested again for HPV for three years. We still recommend annual Pap tests. **If your Pap test is normal but the HPV test is positive, we recommend repeating both the Pap test and the HPV test in 12mos. If the HPV test is again positive or the Pap test is abnormal we will advise you to schedule a colposcopy with us.** Any abnormal Pap test, at any point, regardless of the HPV result requires investigation with a colposcopy

Outlined below are our recommendations for women age 30 and older:

	Normal Pap	Abnormal Pap
HPV Negative	Pap test annually, Re-screening for HPV every three years.	Have a colposcopy.
HPV Positive	Repeat both the HPV and Pap tests in 12 months. If either test is abnormal at that time, have a colposcopy (a procedure in which the cervix is examined using a lighted magnifying device, often accompanied by the removal of tissue for analysis).	Have a colposcopy.