How do I know if I am at risk for cervical cancer?

Healthcare providers traditionally performed the Pap test to look for signs of abnormal cells on the cervix that could lead to cervical cancer. HPV tests can detect if you have the type of infection that puts you at risk for cervical cancer. Knowing if you are positive for HPV will allow your doctor to determine next steps in your treatment or prevention plan.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is one of the most common cancers in women worldwide. It starts in the cervix, located at the lower part of the uterus. When detected early, or in the pre-cancer stage, treatment can be highly successful. Persistent infection of certain high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV) are known to be the primary cause of cervical cancer.

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus that can be transmitted through skin-to-skin or sexual contact. Over 100 types of HPV have been identified. However, only some types are known to cause health problems such as genital warts and cancers. HPV 16 and HPV 18 are the highest-risk types known to cause about 70% of all cervical cancers.

How do you test for HPV infection?

The sample for an HPV test is collected in the same way as for a Pap test. In fact, the same sample can be used for both a Pap test and an HPV test. The sample is sent to a lab where the testing is conducted. You can request an HPV test when you visit your doctor.

If I have HPV, does that mean I will get cervical cancer?

Not everyone infected with HPV will develop cancer. Most infections have no symptoms, are harmless, and are cleared by the body’s natural immune system. However, in some cases, if HPV infection persists and is left undetected, it can lead to cervical cancer. It’s important to get screened for cervical cancer as part of your routine health exam.

If I have HPV, does that mean my partner has been unfaithful?

Even if you have been in a long-term, monogamous relationship, you could still test positive, as the virus can stay dormant (latent) for years before an infection is detected. Testing positive is not a reflection on you, your partner, or your lifestyle.

How do I reduce my risk for cervical cancer?

Routine cervical cancer screening is one of the most important steps you can take to identify your risk. You may also be able to lower your risk by not smoking, using condoms during sex, and limiting your number of sexual partners. The CDC also recommends vaccination for females between the ages of 11 and 26. However, even if you have already been vaccinated, screening is still important since the vaccine does not protect against all high-risk HPV.

What is the cobas® HPV Test?

The cobas® HPV Test is used in cervical cancer screening to determine a woman’s risk of precancer or cancer. The test provides three results in one test: individual results for HPV 16 and HPV 18, in addition to a pooled result for 12 other high-risk HPV types. Having immediate information about your risk of cervical cancer can help you and your doctor determine what next steps to take.