

## YOUR PAP SMEAR

### What and why

The "pap smear" is a simple inexpensive and painless test to detect cancer of the cervix (the lower end of the females uterus, or womb). This test is usually performed in a clinic by a health care provider. Most doctors recommend having this done yearly unless a woman falls into a low risk group. These groups include women whose first intercourse was after age twenty, one sexual partner, previously normal pap smears, no history of sexually transmitted disease, nonsmokers, etc.

The pap smear was named after Dr. Papanicolaou who first developed the practice of smearing cervical cells onto a glass slide for microscopic examination. The doctor places a speculum into the vagina visualizing the cervix. Using a small plastic spatula or brush, cells are scraped off the surface of the cervix and the cervical canal. These scrapings are then placed on a slide and sent to the lab. There, it is evaluated for abnormal cells indicating the possibility of precancer or cancer.

Your doctor may then follow the pap smear with a bimanual exam. This is where he/she feels for any abnormalities of the vagina and pelvic organs.

Pap smear results will be given to you 1-2 weeks after the test is performed. If the results are abnormal, your doctor will discuss treatment options with you.

Remember, cervical cancer is preventable with early detection. Pap smears can find early cell changes in the cervix before they become cancer. If the problem is caught early, treatment is usually safe and effective.