

The HPV Test



At Baystate Ob/Gyn Group, Inc., we take great pride in remaining on the forefront of women's health. In response to recent advances in cervical cancer screening and research, we are now using the HPV test for women age 30 and over in conjunction with Pap smears.

What is HPV?

HPV is a very common virus that is spread through genital skin-to-skin contact; it is estimated that 80% of women get HPV by age 50. Although most cases of HPV resolve without further problems, certain types of HPV can cause cervical cancer.

What is the difference between a Pap smear and the HPV test?

A Pap smear looks for abnormal cell changes on the cervix that occur as a result of a persistent high-risk HPV infection. The HPV test looks for the HPV infection itself, even if it hasn't yet caused abnormal cells.



Rebekah Perks, WHNP, ANP

Nurse Practitioner Spotlight: Rebekah Perks, WHNP, ANP

"Listening is the most important part of my practice as a nurse practitioner. By listening well, I strive to appreciate all aspects of a client's health condition, including physical symptoms as well as emotional, social, and spiritual factors that influence health. Using this information, I work as a team with each client, offering my advice and tailor-

Why is there a need for two tests?

We use the HPV test in conjunction with the screening Pap test for women age 30 and over to assess more accurately the risk of cervical cancer. Women who test negative for high-risk HPV AND have a normal Pap test have virtually no risk of developing cervical cancer before their next scheduled visit. Historically the recommendation has been to have a Pap smear annually. However, the recent advances in technology and extensive research have allowed for changes in the need for follow up screening in some cases. Depending on your results, you may not need another screening until three years have passed. Knowing your HPV status in combination with your Pap results helps you and your provider determine how often you should be screened.

What do the results mean?

If your initial HPV test is positive, do not be alarmed.

The virus is fairly common and will usually be cleared by your immune system. It is possible to have a positive HPV test and normal Pap smear, or vice versa. These results will allow your provider to determine the best course of action to monitor properly your cervical health. Your HPV status is not a reliable indicator of you or your partner's sexual behavior. HPV can lie dormant in cervical cells for many years before becoming an active infection.

What are the recommendations for women under 30?

In patients age 29 and younger, the annual Pap smear remains the recommended screening test. Routine HPV testing isn't necessary in this population because HPV infections in younger women usually go away on their own without causing problems.

We invite you to discuss your questions about cervical cancer screening with your practitioner.

with specialties in Adult and Women's Healthcare.

Rebekah especially enjoys talking with women about their experiences and educating them about their health concerns. She takes great pride in providing patients with information so they can make informed decisions. She sees patients in our South Hadley office.