

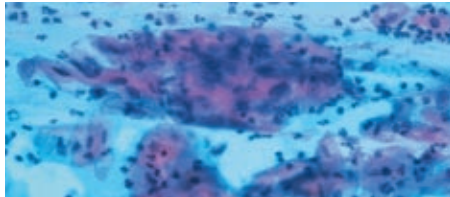
## The ThinPrep Test *continued*

For a ThinPrep test, the Pap smear is collected in the usual manner with no additional samples being needed. Your doctor simply rinses the same sampling implement in a special vial of ThinPrep preservative solution and it is this sample that is sent to the laboratory where a machine-made slide is prepared.

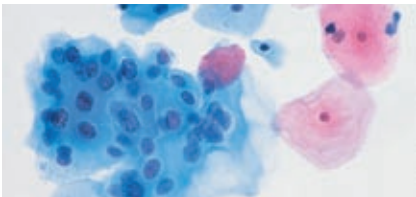
While the conventional Pap smears alone are very reliable, occasionally a smear may be unsatisfactory for assessment at the laboratory due to the presence of excessive mucus, blood or inflammatory cells or when insufficient cells are collected. The ThinPrep test provides additional cellular material for examination and the ThinPrep process itself produces a slide that is less obscured by blood and mucus, which in some cases may be easier to examine than the conventional Pap smear.

There is an additional fee for the ThinPrep test which is not claimable from Medicare. (For details of the exact cost, see our Billing Guide for Out Patients, My Pathology Test - What will it cost?)

*In some conventional Pap smears cells may be obscured by inflammation or blood.*



There is no doubt that having a Pap smear every two years means that the chance of detecting pre-cancerous cell changes is increased, maximising your chance of successful treatment.



*The ThinPrep test provides additional cellular material for assessment and may reduce the false negative rate and the unsatisfactory rate.*

Committed to Women's Health, Western Diagnostic Pathology has developed a team of expert scientists and doctors who specialise in this difficult area. Taking and examining Pap smears is a complex, time-consuming and labour intensive process requiring extreme care, concentration and expertise. We have introduced thorough quality assurance measures that mean your Pap smear is analysed to the highest quality standard.

Cervical Cancer is largely preventable through regular Pap smears.

For more information, please contact your doctor or call Western Diagnostic Pathology on 08 9317 0999

# *understanding your pap smear*



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# This brochure will help you understand more about your Pap smear, the testing process and the results.

## The purpose of a Pap smear.

The purpose of a Pap smear is to detect abnormal pre-cancerous cells (cells which may have the potential to develop into cancer). If such cells are identified in a Pap smear, further investigations can be performed to clarify the severity of the abnormality. In most cases this leads to early and effective treatment of the abnormality, and the risk of development of cervical cancer is greatly reduced.

## When you need a Pap smear.

If you've ever had sexual intercourse you should have regular Pap smears, regardless of how many partners you've had and even if you're not currently sexually active.

After your first smear you should have one every two years until you are 70 years of age. You should continue to have smears after menopause and sometimes even if you've had a hysterectomy, as advised by your doctor.

Reminder systems exist, which you can choose to utilise, in order to receive a reminder note when your next smear is due.

If you have any unusual symptoms, such as abnormal bleeding, spotting or discharge, you should see your doctor regardless of the result of your last smear.

Medicare rebates are available for all Pap smears, no matter how often they are taken.

## The taking of a Pap smear.

The smear is taken during a vaginal examination. An instrument called a speculum is inserted into your vagina so that the cervix is clearly visible. A small spatula or brush is then used to gently remove cells from the surface of the cervix.

The cells are then smeared on a glass slide and sent to the laboratory for examination. The examination is carried out by highly trained scientific and medical staff to ensure the results are as accurate as possible. A report is then sent to your doctor.

## Results

Results of Pap smears fall into three broad groups:

### Normal or negative (about 90% of results).

This means there are no abnormal cells seen on the Pap smear slide.

### Abnormal or atypical (about 5-10% of results).

The test shows that there are some abnormal cells present.

Most abnormal smear reports refer to minor changes in cervical cells, and the only action usually required is to repeat the smear in twelve months. Usually, minor abnormalities disappear without any treatment.

In a small number of cases, if more marked changes are detected, a colposcopic evaluation will be recommended.

A colposcope is a specialised microscope which enables detailed inspection of the cervix. The procedure is usually conducted by a gynaecologist experienced in looking after women with abnormal Pap smear results.

If the colposcope confirms that there is an abnormal area, then a biopsy is performed. In this simple procedure, a small piece of tissue is removed and examined by a pathologist for diagnosis.

At Western Diagnostic Pathology we have a team of pathologists with expertise in gynaecological pathology.

### Unsatisfactory (about 2-3% of results).

Sometimes, due to factors beyond anyone's control, the smear is impossible to interpret reliably.

In the case of an unsatisfactory result, you will need a repeat smear. Usually it will take place about three months after the first one.

## Accuracy

Regular Pap smears are essential throughout adult life. Pap smears have very good accuracy but are not perfect. Any one test may fail to detect an abnormality (a "false negative" result) for one of two reasons:

- *The smear may not be fully representative of all the cells in the cervix, especially if an abnormal area is small or difficult to reach when the smear is being taken.*

- *The abnormal cells may be missed or misinterpreted during microscopic examination. This may occur when these cells are very few in number or because they are difficult to recognise as a result of poor preservation, bleeding or inflammation.*

Fortunately, since abnormal cells are usually present for many years before actual cancer develops, almost all life threatening cancers can still be prevented if Pap smears are repeated regularly.

## The ThinPrep Test

In addition to the conventional Pap smear, Western Diagnostic Pathology offers the ThinPrep Pap test. When used in conjunction with the conventional Pap smear, ThinPrep can improve the overall testing reliability through the addition of different sample processing and slide making.

Use of both the conventional Pap smear and ThinPrep can lead to an overall reduction in:

- *false negative results*
- *unsatisfactory reports (which would otherwise have required a repeat test).<sup>1</sup>*

