

# Your First Pelvic Exam

## *What is a pelvic exam and why should I have it done?*

It is a physical exam of a woman's reproductive organs checking for:

- health of your sexual organs and to ensure they are working normally.
- presence of sexually transmitted infection (STI) or other infections (e.g. yeast, bacterial vaginosis).
- cell changes on the cervix (opening of the uterus). This test is called a Pap test.

Cervical cancer is preventable, but women die from the disease every year, usually because the cancer was discovered too late.

## *What happens during a pelvic exam?*

- Your health-care provider will insert a speculum, a slender metal or plastic instrument, into the vagina in order to check your cervix and vaginal walls.
- Your health-care provider may take samples for a Pap test and/or tests for infections.
- Your health-care provider will remove the speculum and then check the shape and position of your uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries by feeling for any lumps or tender spots.
- You may feel pressure during the pelvic exam, but it shouldn't hurt.
- A pelvic exam takes about 5 minutes.
- You may experience spotting after Pap or STI testing.

## *What is a Pap test?*

- A Pap test is a simple test that can find changes in the cervix (see picture).
- During your pelvic exam, your health-care provider will remove a small number of cells from the cervix.

- These cells are sent to a laboratory to be looked at under a microscope.
- A Pap test does not check for STI.

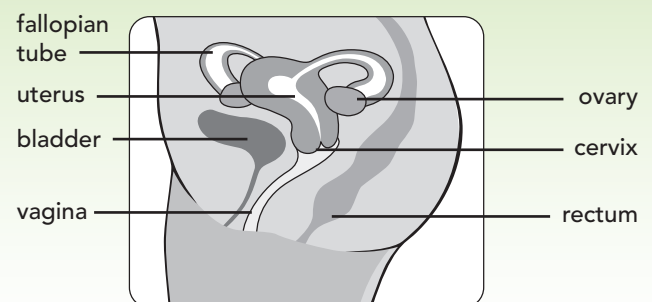
## *Why should I have a Pap test?*

A Pap test is the only way to test for abnormal cell changes on the cervix. Changes on the cervix can be mild, moderate or severe. In some cases, severe cell changes lead to cervical cancer.

- It is important to have **regular** Pap tests as abnormal cell changes often take years to develop. The best way to prevent cervical cancer is to have a regular Pap test.
- Almost all cases of cervical cancer are linked to genital warts, the genital form of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).
- Not all cases of genital HPV produce warts. Not all types of genital HPV cause cervical cancer. However, almost all cases of cervical cancer are linked to the genital HPV virus.

## *What is Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) testing?*

- During a pelvic exam a health-care provider may test for STI.
- They may also check for any sores or lumps that may be in the genital region.
- Swab(s) of the cervix are available to test for chlamydia and gonorrhea. If concerned, ask your health-care provider to do these tests. STI tests are different from a Pap test.



### *Why should I get tested for STI?*

- Anyone who has sex (vaginal, oral or anal) can be exposed to an STI.
- You can not tell if your sexual partner has STI.
- You do not always have signs of STI.
- Untreated STIs can lead to serious damage to your sexual organs in both men and women. This damage can prevent a woman from being able to get pregnant.
- Some STIs can be treated with antibiotics.

### *What other tests can be done?*

- Additional tests can be done to detect yeast, bacterial vaginosis or trichomoniasis.
- Blood tests are also available for other STI (e.g. syphilis and HIV).

### *Sexual decision making*

Choose to have sex or not - you have the right to make that decision.

Choose to protect yourself from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI).

**Use a condom every time you have sex to lower your risk of STI.**

Talk with your partner about these choices before you have sex.



### *How do I prepare for a pelvic exam?*

- Write down questions you want to ask your health-care provider.
- Record when your last period started.
- Discuss with your health-care provider any unusual signs you may have (e.g. changes in your vaginal discharge, bleeding between periods or bleeding after sex).
- Book an appointment for a Pap and/or STI test when you are not having a period.
- Ask your health-care provider when you should return for your next Pap test and book an appointment.

The Pap test is not perfect. **It is important to be tested on a regular basis** to decrease the chance of missing any abnormal cell changes.

### *For more information*

Contact your physician, local community health centre or birth control clinic:

Calgary:	(403) 944-7111
Edmonton:	(780) 735-0010
Fort McMurray:	(780) 791-6263
Grande Prairie:	(780) 513-7551
Lethbridge:	(403) 320-0110
Red Deer:	(403) 346-8336

Or

**Health Link Alberta (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)**

Edmonton, call 408-LINK (5465)

Calgary, call 943-LINK (5465)

Outside the Edmonton

and Calgary local calling areas,

call toll-free 1-866-408-LINK (5465)

STI/HIV Information Line 1-800-772-2437