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# Cervical Screening Using HPV DNA Testing

Cancer Facts and Stats



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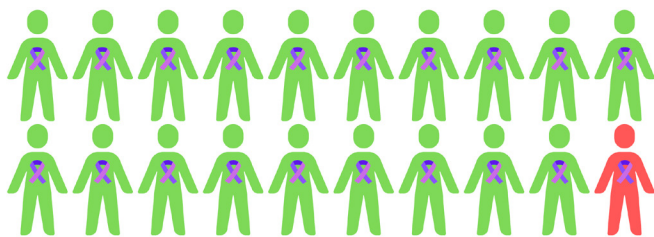
Did you know that the human papillomavirus (HPV) is a cause of all cervical cancers?<sup>1</sup> This has led to a change in the way your doctor will work with you to prevent the disease. In the coming months, Quebec doctors will begin using HPV DNA testing to screen women aged 25 to 65 for cervical cancer.<sup>2</sup>

You can expect an HPV DNA test to be similar to a Pap smear. A clinician will use a swab to brush cells from the cervix. The cervix is the small circular organ on the inside-end of the vagina. Often, a device called a speculum is used to dilate the vagina and make the cervix more accessible. The sample your clinician extracts will be sent to a lab where it will be tested for genetic material that detects the HPV virus. This is different than the Pap test, which looks for changes in the shape of cells, not for the HPV virus itself.

Before a cell becomes cancerous, it undergoes changes. If detected early, doctors can sometimes treat or remove precancerous cells in order to lower a person's risk of developing cervical cancer. Being positive for the HPV virus means you are more likely to have precancerous cells in need of treatment/removal.<sup>1</sup>

Any person with a cervix can be screened for cervical lesions.<sup>3,4</sup> However, many people feel uneasy about the procedure involved. In the future, researchers hope uncomfortable patients will have the choice to collect genital samples without the help of a doctor. This technique has shown promising accuracy<sup>5</sup> and comfortability<sup>6</sup> among women. Early evidence suggests that transmasculine people may be more likely to participate in HPV DNA testing when self-sampling is an option.<sup>7</sup>

HPV DNA screening tests are better than traditional Pap smears at finding precancers and cancers. In most cases, HPV DNA tests correctly detect over 19 in 20 cervical precancers and cancers.<sup>8</sup>



## 19 in 20

people who have cervical precancer/cancer will test positive

Cancer screening can be a stressful process. If you are hesitant to be screened because you are worried about an unfavourable result, here is what to expect if you receive a...

→ **Negative Result:** Extremely few people who have a negative HPV DNA result will ultimately develop cervical precancer (about 6 in 1000) or cancer (about 1 in 1000) within 14 years following testing.<sup>9</sup>



## 1 in 1000

people who test negative will develop cervical cancer in the following 14 years. 6 in 1000 will develop cervical precancer

→ **Positive Result:** Even if you were vaccinated against HPV, it is possible for you to have an enduring HPV infection that may one day cause cervical cancer. However, only about 1 in 5 people who test positive for HPV DNA truly have cervical precancer or cancer.<sup>10</sup> Your doctor will perform additional tests to rule out, monitor or treat cervical lesions. People who test positive for HPV DNA but do not have cervical precancer or cancer will be retested within a year as a precaution. It is likely that the infection(s) which made the test positive will have disappeared by this time.



## 1 in 5

people who have a positive result truly have cervical precancer/cancer

Quebec doctors are organizing the switch to HPV DNA screening now. If the program is similar to Quebec's current breast cancer screening program, women aged 25 to 65 can expect to receive an invitation to book a screening appointment every 5 years, or to be able to ask their family doctor for a screening prescription.

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