What is the human papillomavirus (HPV)?

- HPV is a virus passed from the skin of one person to another during sex. Though usually harmless, some HPV types can slowly lead to cervical cancer if not treated.

What is an HPV test?

- An HPV test checks your cervix for the virus that can cause abnormal cells and cervical cancer. For women ages 30 and older, the HPV test is often done at the same time as a Pap test, from the same swab.
- If the Pap test and HPV test are normal, you can wait five years before testing again. (If a Pap test is done without an HPV test, the next Pap test is due in three years.)

How can I reduce my risk of cervical cancer?

- Get a Pap test regularly.
- Do not smoke.
- By not having sex you can prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and greatly reduce your risk for cervical cancer.
- If you do have sex, sex with only one STD-free, lifelong partner is the safest sex. Otherwise, limit the number of your sexual partners, and always use a condom.
- HPV vaccines are available to protect young women ages 9 to 26 against the HPV types that most often cause cervical cancer.

What do I do if I cannot afford to pay for a Pap test?

- *Women's Way* may provide a way to pay for Pap tests, pelvic exams, clinical breast exams and mammograms for women ages 40 through 64. Call 1.800.44 WOMEN or visit www.ndhealth.gov/womensway to see if you are eligible.

WOMEN'S WAY
a breast and cervical cancer early detection program

Find us on Facebook

For more information, contact:
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Division of Cancer Prevention and Control
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1.800.44 WOMEN
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NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

Taking Care of *You*

Information About Pap Tests

What is a Pap test?

- A Pap test checks the cells of the cervix (the opening of the uterus) for changes that could lead to cancer.
- It is usually not painful and takes only a few minutes.
- During a pelvic exam, a health-care provider inserts a special tool (speculum) into the vagina and collects some cells from the cervix with a swab.

Why is a Pap test important?

- Regular Pap tests and treatment when needed can prevent most cancers of the cervix.
- Women who have cancer of the cervix may not have any symptoms.
- If cancer or precancer develops, it can be found early and treated.

When should I have my first Pap test?

- Women should start having regular Pap tests at age 21.

How often should I have a Pap test?

- Most women should have a Pap test every three years.
- Some women need Pap tests more often. Talk to your health-care provider to find out what's right for you.

What's the best time for a Pap test?

- One to two weeks after your period is over.
- After any bleeding from the vagina has stopped.
- After any infection in the vagina has been treated and cleared.

How do I prepare for a Pap test?

- Do not have sexual intercourse for 48 hours before the test.
- Do not put anything in your vagina for 48 hours before the test, including tampons, douches, cervical caps, diaphragms, vaginal creams, lubricants or birth control foam.

How will I know what my Pap test results are?

- The Pap test is sent to a lab. Results are sent from the lab to your health-care provider, who will contact you with the results. Some health-care providers only contact patients if the results are abnormal.

What if I have questions about my Pap test?

- Talk to your health-care provider. Don't be afraid to ask questions.