

What is HPV? How can I protect myself?

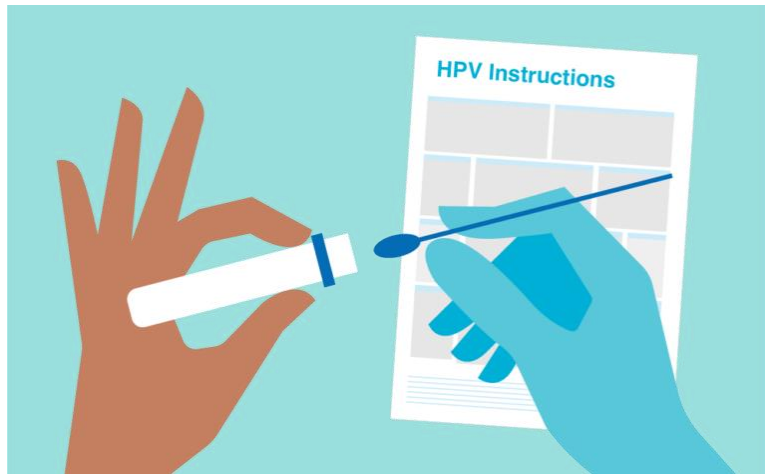
HPV stands for Human papillomavirus. HPV is very small. It is not something you can see with your eyes or know that you have in your body. It is a virus that infects teens and adults. If you have HPV for a long time and do not know about it, it can make you very sick.

Doctors and nurses can help you be protected from HPV. There is a vaccine that can help prevent you from getting HPV. You can get this vaccine when you are a teenager or an adult.

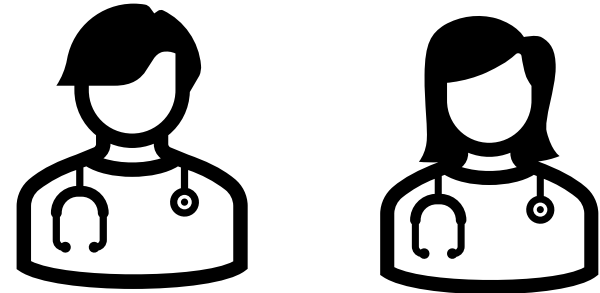
It is also important to get tested to see if you have HPV. This test can now be done at your doctor's office. The test looks at the cells in your vagina. The vagina is an organ inside your body. You will collect the cells for the test by inserting a swab into your vagina. The swab is like a Q-Tip, but smaller. Your doctor or nurse can help you with this test.

These step-by-step instructions will help you prepare and complete your test.

This is how I will test for HPV.



I will be with my doctor or nurse at my appointment.



If someone came with me to my appointment, I can choose if they stay or wait outside.



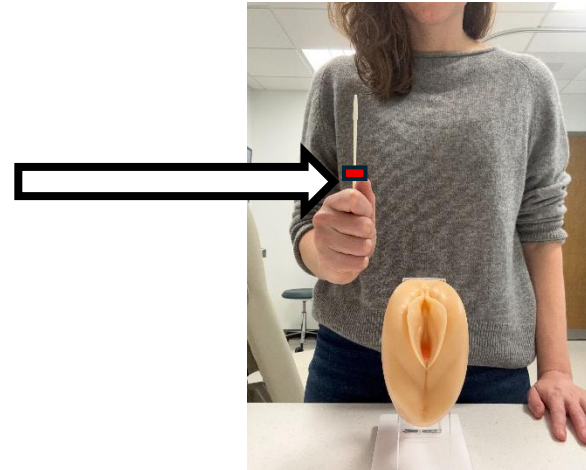
I will wash my hands.



I will open the HPV test kit. If I need help, my doctor or nurse can help me.



I will hold the swab at the red mark.



I will get into a comfortable position. With my doctor or nurse, we can figure out the best position for my body.



I can use one hand to spread my labia apart so my swab can go inside my vagina.



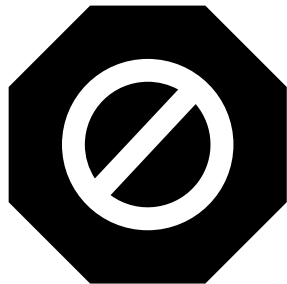
I will insert the swab into my vagina and push until my hand touches my labia.



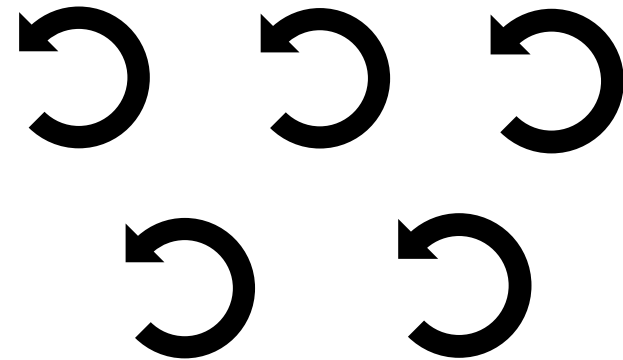
I may need to move my body or hand to make it easier to insert.



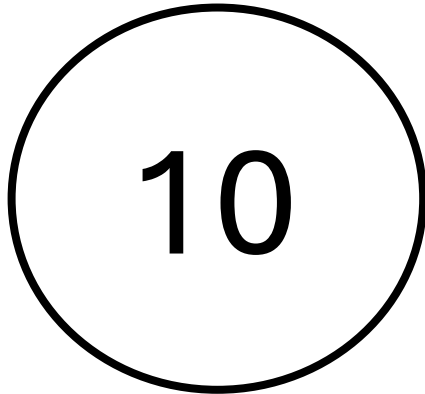
If I feel pain, I should stop and tell my doctor or nurse.



When the swab is inserted, I will move my hand and arm in a circle.



I will count to 10 while I am moving my hand and arm in a circle. If there is pain, I will stop and tell my doctor or nurse.



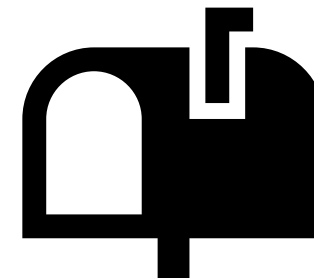
I will take the swab out of my vagina and put it back in a plastic tube. I can hand the swab to my doctor or nurse if I need help.



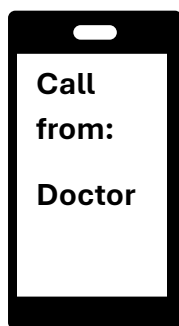
I will wash my hands.



The doctor or nurse will send my HPV swab to a laboratory.



I will get a phone call in about a week about my test results. I can ask questions about my test results.



If my test result shows HPV I will need to see my doctor again. We will do another type of test.

If my test does not have HPV, I can wait 3 years before I need to do this test again.



Copyright © 2025 Thomas Jefferson University *and* Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council. Permission to reprint, copy and distribute this work is granted provided that it is reproduced as a whole, distributed at no more than actual cost, and displays this copyright notice. Any other reproduction is strictly prohibited.

The Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$3,025,222.00 with 100 percent funding by ACL/HHS. Council efforts are those of the grantee and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.