

## **ABNORMAL PAP TEST RESULTS**

### **What is a Pap Test?**

The Pap test is a screening test for cancer of the cervix. During a pelvic examination, an instrument called a speculum holds the vagina open so that the cervix can be seen. The cervix is the opening to the uterus. It is located at the top of the vagina. A small, soft brush is used to collect cells from the cervix. The brush containing these cells is placed into a preservative fluid and sent to the laboratory. A microscopic examination of these cells is then performed to see if the cells are normal or abnormal in appearance.

### **If the Pap is “Abnormal”, what does that mean?**

Abnormal results are reported according to the type of cell changes and the extent of those changes. Abnormal results can include:

- **Inflammation:** This may be the result of an infection, hormonal change, or just normal cell repair. This is not a pre-cancerous change.
- **Atypical Cells of Undermined Significance:** Cells are present which are not completely normal or obviously abnormal. Further evaluation will likely be required such as another Pap test or testing for HPV or sexually transmitted infections.
- **Mild Dysplasia (Low-Grade Squamous Intra-epithelial Neoplasia):** “Dysplasia” indicates distinct abnormal cells which could develop into cancer. A tissue biopsy from the cervix will likely be necessary for further evaluation.
- **Moderate or Severe Dysplasia (High-Grade Squamous Intra-epithelial Neoplasia):** The cells are even more abnormal and show pre-cancerous or early cancerous changes.
- **Cancer:** Definite cancer cells are seen. Extension of the cancer into the deeper tissues or beyond the cervix is likely.

### **What other tests might be done to evaluate an abnormal result:**

- **HPV Typing:** Certain “high-risk” types of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) increase the risk for dysplasia and cancer of the cervix.
- **Colposcopy:** The colposcope is a special microscope to carefully inspect the cervix. This examination helps to determine where the abnormal cells are located and how much of the cervix is involved.
- **Biopsy:** When an abnormal area is identified during the colposcopy, a small piece of this tissue is removed for further analysis. A local anesthetic is used to numb the area before the biopsy is taken.