

## PAP SMEAR

The Pap smear is made during an internal vaginal examination by collecting cells shed from the cervix.

To collect the cells, a wooden spatula is gently scraped across the surface of the cervix, and/or the inside of the cervix is wiped with a special brush.

The brush or the spatula is smeared onto a glass slide, which is examined under a microscope to look for abnormalities in the cells.

For most women the procedure is not painful, but there may be some brief discomfort, similar to period pain.

### Why do a Pap smear?

The Pap smear is a screening test for abnormalities of the cervix, in women who have no symptoms.

A Pap smear can detect changes in cells before cancer develops, as well as cancer at the very earliest stages.

At these stages, treatment usually provides a complete cure. However, if cancer of the cervix enlarges and spreads, cure is less certain.

## Symptoms

When a woman has symptoms, a Pap smear alone is not always an appropriate test.

Symptoms which may require further investigation include:

- bleeding between periods
- bleeding after the menopause
- bleeding after intercourse
- brown or blood-stained vaginal discharge.

Early cell changes (*dysplasia*) and very early cancers usually do not produce symptoms and may only be detected by a Pap smear.

### When to have a Pap smear

A Pap smear should be taken 12 months after first having sexual intercourse and again a year later.

Regular tests, once every two years, are recommended. More frequent testing may be required for some symptoms or after an abnormal smear.

Smear tests are unsatisfactory when performed during menstruation.

The best time to have a pap smear *is two weeks after a period finishes.*

## The results

- If the results are normal, you should have another Pap smear in 2 years time.
- Mild abnormalities may not indicate serious illness. They usually resolve by themselves. A repeat test in 6 months time is usually suggested.
- For some abnormalities a *colposcopy* may be recommended. Clinic 275 will refer you to a gynaecologist for this examination. A colposcopy examines the cervix with a magnifying instrument. Sometimes small amounts of tissue are removed for diagnosis.

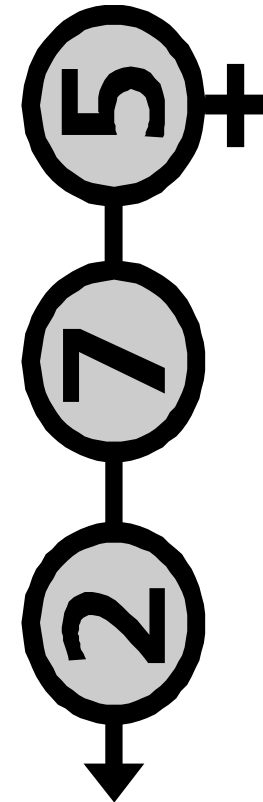
### The Pap smear Register

In South Australia, Pap smear results are recorded on a central system. This system can send you a reminder letter if you are overdue for a Pap smear.

If you would like more information about the Pap smear reminder system, contact the SA Cervix Screening Program:

- (08) 8226 8181
- 13 15 56 - for the cost of a local call.

# Pap Smear



**Sexually Transmitted  
Diseases Service**  
Royal Adelaide Hospital

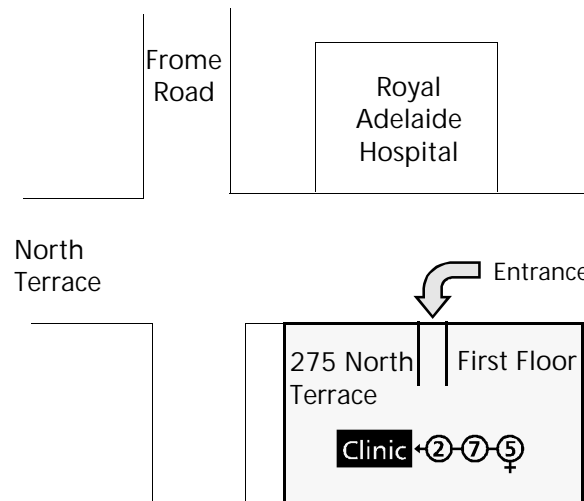
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