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Your Pap test was normal, but you tested positive for HPV

- You have just learned that you have HPV. You may feel confused and scared. But once you have all the facts, you'll learn that having HPV is very common. And it's nothing to be afraid of.
- Most adults will get HPV if they are or have been in a sexual relationship. There's no need for shame, blame, or embarrassment.

First, a few facts:

- HPV – or human papillomavirus – is very common, almost like a cold. ("Papilloma" is pronounced "pap-ah-LO-mah.") In fact, about 8 out of 10 women will have had HPV by the time they're 50.
- The virus is spread through sexual contact. You can get HPV from being intimate with just one partner.

The good news:

- While HPV is common, cervical cancer is not. Most HPV infections go away on their own without causing any problems. It's only when an infection lasts for several years that it can cause abnormal cells to form in the cervix – the kind that can become cervical cancer.

What happens next?

- If you have HPV but your Pap is normal, there's no reason for alarm! Medical experts agree that it's best to wait about a year before repeating both the Pap and HPV tests. Although you may not want to wait, remember that most HPV infections clear up on their own without causing problems.
- If you still have the virus on your next HPV test or your Pap test results are abnormal, then it's time to have a colposcopy. During a colposcopy, your doctor or nurse uses a magnifying device to look at your cervix more closely. Your practitioner may also remove a small sample of tissue to analyze further in the lab. If any pre-cancerous cells are found, they can then be removed.

What should I tell my partner?

Whether to talk to your sexual partner about HPV is your decision. But if you decide to, remember that:

- Chances are, by the time your infection was detected, your partner had already been exposed to HPV.
- Once you share a particular type of the virus through sexual contact, there is no further risk of passing the infection back and forth. If you are sexually active with a new partner, using a condom provides some, although not complete, protection.
- It's almost impossible to determine who gave you HPV or when you first became infected. You could have gotten it from your current partner or any of your previous partners.
- If your partner is a male, there is no FDA-approved HPV test for men. Fortunately, health problems from HPV are rare in males.