

# Preventing Anal Cancer

Anal PAP Smear and HPV Testing | Mount Sinai - Anal Cancer Prevention Program



Mount  
Sinai

Institute for  
Advanced Medicine

## HPV

*Human Papillomavirus, also known as HPV, is a common type of virus. Most people catch it at least once during their lifetime, and most never know they have it. The immune system is often strong enough to clear the virus from the body, but certain types of HPV are difficult to fight. When this happens, HPV may cause warts or subtle changes in anal cells, some of which can lead to cancer if left unchecked.*

*It is important that people at increased anal cancer risk are screened for these changes so they can be detected before they have a chance to become cancerous.*

## HPV & PAP SMEAR

It is often more difficult for people living with HIV to fight off HPV, which makes screening for HPV-related changes more important. Some people without HIV are also at higher risk from disease caused by HPV and may benefit from screening as well.

One part of routine gynecologic care for women is an HPV and/or PAP test. This is a simple test done with a small swab or brush inside a woman's cervix (part of the womb); it helps to determine whether there could be any abnormal areas in the cervix that might be caused by HPV, and if so, whether they need to be tested further or removed.

## ANAL PAP SMEAR, HPV TEST

An anal PAP smear is essentially the same test, but is performed in both women and men. Cells are collected from inside and around the anus using a swab or thin brush. The results may be normal, but sometimes unusual cells are found. These abnormal results don't tell us much by themselves, but they may require a closer look with what's called "High Resolution Anoscopy," or HRA.

## PAP RESULTS & WHAT THEY MEAN

- **Benign/Normal** = All cells are OK, follow up in 1 year
- **Inadequate Sample** = May need another PAP smear
- **ASCUS** = Cells seem unusual but unclear — may need HRA
- **LSIL** = Low grade cell changes seen — need HRA, but may not need treatment
- **HSIL** = High grade cell changes seen — need HRA and treatment to remove changed cells/tissue.

### This does not mean you have cancer

We usually also test whether certain types of HPV are present to determine next steps.

## ABNORMAL PAP/HPV TEST & HRA

Certain combinations of abnormal cells and HPV test results require a more thorough exam of the anal area with a magnifying device/microscope. This is called High-Resolution Anoscopy (HRA) and takes approximately

10 minutes. During the exam, the specialist paints the inside of the anus/butt with solutions that show cell changes. Depending on what is seen, the specialist may take a few samples or "biopsies" of tissue so the lab can diagnose the cell changes and help figure out the best treatment.

HRA may be slightly uncomfortable but is not usually painful; local anesthetic is used if biopsies are taken. Once the HRA is completed, you can go about your day normally.

You don't have to prepare for your HRA in any special way (just take a shower in the morning, but don't douche or use enemas; you can eat, drink and take your medications as per usual).

**For more information or to schedule an appointment at Mount Sinai Harlem Health Center or Mount Sinai Comprehensive Health Program in Chelsea, call 332-243-0177.**