

ASC-US Pap Smear

Your Diagnosis

Recently, your doctor performed a Pap smear to obtain a sample of cells from the surface of your cervix and vagina. The cells were sent to a laboratory where a specially trained doctor called a pathologist examined them under a microscope to identify any abnormalities.

The report your doctor received from the laboratory states that you have **atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance (ASC-US)**. This means some of your cervical cells were mildly abnormal, but the meaning of the abnormal changes was unclear.

ASC-US is the most common abnormal Pap smear finding. Often, the cellular changes (known as dysplasia) seen in abnormal Pap smears are caused by infection with a virus called **human papillomavirus**, or **HPV**. Persistent genital infection with a high-risk type of HPV is known to be the leading cause of cervical cancer.

Your Job

- Follow your doctor's recommendations for follow-up exams and tests. Keep a record of the dates and results of any exams or tests you have; it might come in handy if you ever change doctors or insurance providers or if you experience a reproductive health problem in the future.
- Contact your doctor if you experience pain or any other new symptoms, or if you notice a change in the amount, appearance, or smell of your vaginal discharge. Many problems that affect a woman's reproductive tract (including sexually transmitted diseases) can cause similar symptoms. Your doctor can determine the exact cause of your symptoms, prescribe the right treatment, and teach you how to keep from spreading an infection to others or becoming infected again.
- The HPV virus can remain latent (hide) in cervical cells for decades without detection or warning symptoms. If you or your partner ever had sex with another person, you may have become infected with HPV. Even if you have been in a long-term, monogamous (single partner) relationship, you could still be diagnosed with HPV at some time in the future.
- If you smoke, quit. Smoking has been identified as a factor that may increase your risk of cervical cancer. If you have difficulty quitting smoking, talk to your doctor. She may be able to recommend a smoking cessation program to increase your chances for success.