

Title: Abnormal Pap Smear in Pregnancy

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Date: 2/25/09

Key words: Pap smear, Papanicolaou, Pregnancy, Pregnant, Abnormal, LSIL, HSIL, Colposcopy, Biopsy

Abstract: 2-7% of pregnant women in the United States will have an abnormal pap during pregnancy. An abnormal pap smear means that some of the cells that were brushed off the cervix during a pap smear appeared atypical, or abnormal, under the microscope. There are many causes of atypical cervical cells, but they are often from infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). Cervical dysplasia (change in the cells of the cervix) is considered pre-cancerous because if left untreated it can progress to cervical cancer. Some abnormal pap results will lead to an exam called a colposcopy. Colposcopy is when a doctor uses a microscope to look at the cervix. This procedure is similar to a pelvic exam and usually takes about 15 minutes. The doctor will try to visualize any abnormal areas on the cervix and decide if the abnormal area(s) appear to be mild, moderate, or severe dysplasia. The doctor will then decide if a biopsy is required. Current recommendations suggest that pregnant women with cervical lesions that appear to be moderate or severe dysplasia by colposcopy should be biopsied.

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Abnormal Pap Smears in Pregnancy

Have you been told that you have an abnormal pap smear and you are pregnant? If so, you are not alone. In fact, 2-7% of pregnant women in the United States will have an abnormal pap during pregnancy.

What is an abnormal pap?

An abnormal pap smear means that some of the cells that were brushed off the cervix during a pap smear appeared atypical, or abnormal, under the microscope. There are many causes of atypical cervical cells, but they are often from infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). Cervical dysplasia (change in the cells of the cervix) is considered pre-cancerous because if left untreated it can progress to cervical cancer. Because of this, it is very important to follow up with your doctor after an abnormal pap result.

What is ASCUS?

ASCUS is an acronym for atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance. This means that the cervical cells look somewhat abnormal, but not abnormal enough to be called dysplasia, and the cause is unknown.

What is LSIL?

LSIL is an acronym for low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion. This means that there is mild dysplasia, or change, in the appearance of the cervical cells. LSILs are almost always caused by HPV. During pregnancy women with LSILs are usually asked to have a repeat pap smear at the post partum visit. It is common for LSILs to regress spontaneously, but they must be followed closely.

What is HSIL?

HSIL is an acronym for high-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion. This means that there is moderate to severe dysplasia, or change, in the appearance of the cervical cells. HSILs are almost always caused by HPV. During pregnancy women with HSIL paps are usually asked to schedule an appointment to have a colposcopy.

What is colposcopy?

Colposcopy is when a doctor uses a microscope to look at the cervix. This procedure is similar to a pelvic exam and usually takes about 15 minutes. The doctor will try to visualize any abnormal areas on the cervix and decide if the abnormal area(s) appear to be mild, moderate, or severe dysplasia. The doctor will then decide if a biopsy is required.

Will I need a biopsy?

Current recommendations suggest that pregnant women with cervical lesions that appear to be moderate or severe dysplasia by colposcopy should be biopsied. If the doctor needs to do a biopsy, he/she will take a small piece of the most abnormal looking part of the cervix. The biopsy will provide the doctor with a more accurate picture of the changes that are taking place in the cervix, and will help determine the most appropriate follow up and/or treatment.

What is CIS?

CIS is an acronym for carcinoma in-situ. This means that there is severe dysplasia, or change, in the appearance of the cervical cells. CIS is not cancer because the abnormal cells have not become invasive. CIS will need to be examined by colposcopy and may require treatment to remove the abnormal cells.

What if it is cancer?

Cancer means that the abnormal cells have become invasive. If you have cancer, you and your doctor will decide on a treatment plan together.