



## Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is a cancer that's found anywhere in the cervix. The cervix is the opening between the vagina and the womb (uterus). It's part of the reproductive system and is sometimes called the neck of the womb. Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by an infection from certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV).

It can often be prevented by attending cervical screening, which aims to find and treat changes to cells before they turn into cancer.

### Did you know...

Cervical cancer mainly affects sexually active women between 30 and 45

Nearly all cervical cancer is caused by HPV

HPV testing is part of cervical screening

Cervical screening invites are sent out every three years

### Signs and symptoms

- Vaginal bleeding that's unusual for you – including bleeding during or after sex, between your periods or after the menopause, or having heavier periods than usual
- Changes to your vaginal discharge
- Pain during sex
- Pain in your lower back, between your hip bones (pelvis), or in your lower tummy
- If you have another condition like fibroids or endometriosis, you may get symptoms like these regularly.
- You might find you get used to them. But it's important to be checked by a GP if your symptoms change, get worse, or do not feel normal for you.

### Screening

- Cervical screening (some people may call this a “smear test”) is the best way you can reduce your risk of developing cervical cancer
- All women and people with a cervix between the ages of 25 and 64 are invited for regular cervical screening. It helps find and treat any changes in the cells of the cervix before they can turn into cancer.
- They are nothing to worry about, only take minutes and contrary to popular belief they are not painful!
- Invites are sent out every three years and it is vital you attend your screening as it really could save your life!
- All children aged 12 to 13 are offered the HPV vaccine.



# Cervical screening (Smear Test)

## Why have a 'smear test'

- The cervical smear programme is an important test of the health of your cervix
- It is not a test for cancer in itself, but it does aim to reduce the number of women who develop cancer by detecting abnormal cells in the cervix at an early stage
- An abnormal result does not mean that you have cancer; many changes resolve on their own
- Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women under 35 years, with about 2800 new cases diagnosed each year
- It is estimated that 75% of cancers can be prevented by detecting changes early

## Arranging your test

- The NHS Screening Programme sends out reminders to all women between the age of 25 and 64 when they are due a smear
- If you think you may have missed your smear or unsure when you are due one, speak to the practice nurse who can advise you
- When you have received your reminder, speak to the receptionists who will be able to arrange your smear with the nurses

## How often should you be tested

- Women are offered screening at different intervals, depending on their age:
- Women should receive their first invitation for screening at 25
- Women aged 25-49 are invited for screening every three years
- Women aged 50-64 are invited for screening every five years
- Women aged 65 or over are only screened if they have not been screened since they were 50 or have had recent abnormal test results

Sometimes, women who have had abnormal or borderline results may be recalled for a repeat smear earlier than above.

## Having the test

- It is best to have the smear taken about midway between periods. Most smears are performed by the nurses and take about 5-10 minutes.
- You will need to be undressed from the waist downwards. A speculum is inserted into the vagina (this simply holds the walls open to allow a good view of the cervix). A small brush is used to take a sample of the cells of the cervix.
- The examination can be uncomfortable and a bit embarrassing for some women but should not hurt. If it does hurt, tell the person doing the test.

## Getting your results

- You will be informed by the Contractor Services Agency of your cervical smear result.
- If you have any queries regarding your result, please telephone the surgery and ask to speak to a Practice Nurse.

## Risks and how to reduce them

Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by an infection with certain high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV). You can get HPV from:

- any skin-to-skin contact of the genital area
- vaginal, anal or oral sex
- sharing sex toys

Anyone with a cervix can get cervical cancer. This includes women, trans men, non-binary people, and intersex people with a cervix. You cannot get cervical cancer if you've had surgery to remove your womb and cervix (total hysterectomy).

You might also be more likely to get cervical cancer if:

- you're under 45 – cervical cancer is more common in younger people
- you have a weakened immune system, like if you have HIV or AIDS
- you have given birth to multiple children or had children at an early age (under 17 years old)
- your mother took the hormonal medicine diethylstilbestrol (DES) while pregnant with you – your GP can discuss these risks with you
- you've had vaginal, vulval, kidney or bladder cancer in the past

### **Cervical screening and HPV vaccination are the best ways to protect yourself**

- All women and people with a cervix between the ages of 25 and 64 are invited for regular cervical screening. It helps find and treat any changes in the cells of the cervix before they can turn into cancer.
- All children aged 12 to 13 are offered the HPV vaccine. It helps protect against all cancers caused by HPV, as well as genital warts.

### **You can also lower your chance of getting cervical cancer by:**

- using condoms, which lower your chance of getting HPV – but they do not cover all of the skin around your genitals so you're not fully protected
- quitting smoking – smoking can weaken your immune system and the chemicals in cigarettes can also cause cervical cancer
- eating a balanced diet to help support your immune system

## Further information and resources

- [Healthworks 'Take a minute' cervical cancer video](#)
- [NHS website](#)
- [Don't ignore your cervical screening invite](#)
- [Cancer Research video - should I go for cervical screening](#)
- [NHS - Cervical Screening](#)
- [Cancer Research - cervical cancer](#)
- [National Cervical Cancer Coalition](#)
- [Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust](#)
- [MacMillan Cancer Support](#)