

A smear test could Save your life

Don't ignore your invitation for cervical screening.





You're being invited for your cervical screening (smear) test.

This is a quick test to look at a sample of cells from your cervix (neck of the womb).



Cervical screening is offered to women (and anyone with a cervix) aged between 25 and 64 years. Some people are offered screening up to the age of 70 years if results from previous screenings show there are changes that need to be monitored.

Going for screening every time you're invited is the best thing you can do to prevent cervical cancer. It could save your life. It can stop cervical cancer before it starts.

> The test should take no more than 5 minutes and could save your life.

Benefits of screening

It can find changes even if you look healthy and have no symptoms.

It's the best way of finding out if you're at risk of cervical cancer.

Book your appointment with your GP practice today.

If you need any extra support, there are things we can do to help (see page 4).

How cervical screening works

Cervical screening checks the cells from your cervix for the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer.

Having HPV is actually very common. It'll usually be cleared by the body itself in time. Four out of five people in Scotland will have it at some point in their lives.

Testing your sample for HPV before looking for cell changes is the most effective and accurate way of finding out if you're more likely to develop cervical cancer.

If HPV is found in your sample, the same cells will then be looked at to see if it has caused any changes to them. If cell changes are found, they could lead to cervical cancer if left untreated.

If HPV is not found in your sample you'll be invited for cervical screening again in five years. This is because research shows your chance of developing cervical cancer in this time is very low.

No screening test is 100% effective.

If you have unusual discharge, or bleeding after sex, between periods or after the menopause, contact your GP practice. These are usually caused by something other than cancer but it's important to have them checked.

HPV and cervical cancer

Over 99% of all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. Your body can clear most HPV infections by itself, but about 1 in 10 infections are harder to get rid of.

There are lots of types of HPV. The types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer (also known as high-risk HPV) are passed on through sexual contact. This includes penetrative sex as well as other types of sexual activity, such as skin-to-skin contact of the genital area, or using sex toys. Condoms do not give total protection from HPV.

Smoking increases your risk of developing cervical cancer. This is because it makes it harder for your body to get rid of HPV infections. Information about stopping smoking is available at **www.quityourway.scot**

Even if you've already had the HPV vaccine it's important you still come for screening. This is because the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cancer. **It's the combination of HPV vaccination and cervical screening that should eventually wipe out cervical cancer in Scotland**.

Fact

After breast cancer, cervical cancer is the most common women's cancer in the world.

Your cervical screening appointment



Ataglance

- Your cervical screening appointment will last about 10–15 minutes from start to finish. The test itself should take no longer than 5 minutes.
- You might feel some discomfort but it should not be painful. Any discomfort should pass quickly.

If you need extra support, there are things we can do to help. For example, you can ask for a translator, female nurse or GP.

You can book a longer appointment if you need a bit more time to talk things through.

What happens at your appointment

- You'll be asked to undress from the waist down (or just to remove your underwear if you're wearing a skirt). You'll also be given a sheet to cover yourself.
- You'll be asked to lie on an examination bed. Your nurse or GP will gently insert a speculum (medical instrument) into your vagina to hold it open, so they can see your cervix. They will then gently brush cells from the cervix using a soft brush.
- If you feel any discomfort, let your nurse or GP know. There are things they can do to make it easier.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we ask that you come to your appointment alone, unless you need help from a carer or family member. We're trying to limit the number of people within the building and waiting room areas.

Try to make an appointment for a day when you will not have your period. This is just because it's difficult to get a clear view of your cervix during your period.

It's normal to feel anxious, especially at your first appointment. But remember we carry out cervical screening tests every day.

> Your nurse or GP will put you at ease.

You undress behind a private screen.

Your results

You'll usually get your results in the post within two weeks. If you'd like these to be sent to another address, please tell the person doing the test.

The results will also be sent to whoever took your test and your GP. If you have not received your results within four weeks, contact your GP practice.

What results could I get?





No screening test is 100% effective. If screening does not find cell changes this does not guarantee that you do not have them, or that they will never develop in the future. But evidence shows that cervical screening is still the best way of preventing cervical cancer.

Do I need the test if...

I only have sex with women?

'Yes. The types of HPV that can cause changes in the cells of your cervix are passed on by any sexual contact, such as skin-to-skin contact of the genital area, or using sex toys.'

I've had the HPV vaccine?

'Yes. The vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV and will not protect against any HPV infections you picked up before you had the vaccine. So although the vaccine offers good protection, it's still important to attend for regular cervical screening tests.'

I'm in a long-term relationship?

'Yes. You can have HPV for many years without knowing it and you can get it during your first sexual contact. So regular cervical screening is still important even if you've been with the same person for a long time.'

I have not been sexually active for a long time?

'Yes. Many people have HPV for months or years without knowing it. So it's important you have regular cervical screening tests if you've ever been sexually active.'

I've never had sex before?

'If you've never been sexually active there's a lower chance of you having HPV. But remember, being sexually active includes penetrative sex and other types of sexual contact, such as skin-to-skin contact of the genital area, or using sex toys. Speak to a health professional if you're unsure.'

I've been through the menopause?

'Yes. You still need to check your cervix is healthy. Sometimes the test may be more uncomfortable because of dryness in the vagina after menopause. But your nurse or GP will have ways to make it more comfortable.'

I'm transgender or a non-binary person?

This will depend on whether you have a cervix or not. To understand more about what screening services you're eligible for visit: **www.nhsinform.scot/transscreening**

I've had a hysterectomy?

'You may not need a test. Check with your nurse or GP before making an appointment.'

I have HIV?

'If you have HIV, you'll be invited for a cervical screening test every year. HIV can make your immune system very weak, meaning it's not as able to get rid of the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers. Speak to your GP, nurse or specialist about this.'

I'm pregnant?

'Cervical screening is not recommended during pregnancy. If you're invited for cervical screening while pregnant, please let your GP know. You can make an appointment for three months after your baby is born instead.'

What happens to your test sample

Your cervical screening test sample is sent to a lab, which will keep it for at least 10 years to compare tests at different times. You'll be contacted if the results suggest your care should be changed in any way. Your sample may also be tested again so the NHS can check how well it's preventing cancer.

How is my information used?

NHSScotland will keep your personal screening information, including test results, in an NHSScotland-approved secure environment. All NHS staff must keep your personal information confidential, which means it's only shared with other staff involved in your care.

We regularly review our screening service to make sure we provide the best service possible. We use information from screening to identify areas for improvement and make sure the service meets agreed standards. Only authorised staff and appropriate healthcare professionals have access to this information.

We may use the information for research, education and training. If this happens we'll remove your personal details. You have rights in relation to the access and the use of your personal health information. For more information about your rights or how the NHS uses your personal information visit: www.nhsinform.scot/confidentiality and www.nhsinform.scot/data-protection

Want to know more?

If you have any questions or concerns, you can:

- Talk to your nurse or GP
- Visit www.nhsinform.scot/cervicalscreening
- Contact Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust: visit **www.jostrust.org.uk** or call **0808 802 8000.**



Other formats available at:



This leaflet was developed with



Published by Public Health Scotland 1 South Gyle Crescent Edinburgh EH12 9EB © Public Health Scotland 2020 All rights reserved.

Established on 1 April 2020, Public Health Scotland is Scotland's national public agency for improving and protecting the health and wellbeing of Scotland's people.

www.publichealthscotland.scot

