

English

# CERVICAL SCREENING

**What you need to know**

**TimeToCervicalScreen.nz**



**Safe.**

**Accurate.**

**Self-test option.**



National  
Cervical  
Screening  
Programme

## Kia ora and welcome

Cervical screening looks for the human papillomavirus (HPV) that causes most cervical cancers. You can do the test yourself, usually in a private area at your screening appointment, or you can ask for help to get it done. Some screen-takers may offer other locations, including community settings, mobile units and even taking the test home to do and return. This won't be the case for all healthcare providers so check what options are available in your area.

By having regular screening (usually every 5 years) and being immunised against HPV, you can protect yourself against cervical cancer. This way you can stay healthy for yourself and your whānau.



## How do I know if I'm eligible for cervical screening?

Cervical screening is recommended if you are:

- a woman or anyone with a cervix;
- aged between 25 and 69;
- sexually active or have ever been.

It makes no difference what your sexuality or gender identity is, or if you have not been sexually active for a long time. If you have a cervix, it's best to get tested.

If you've had a total hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) check with your healthcare provider to see if you still need to have screening.

If you're pregnant, it is safe to do the test.

If you've got your period, you can still have a screening test, as long as bleeding isn't too heavy because this could affect the test result.

## Funding for screening

The National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP) is not fully funded. However, screening is free for women and people with a cervix who:

- are aged 30 or over and have never had a screening test or are under-screened
- require follow-up testing
- hold a Community Services Card
- are Māori or Pacific.

## Where do I go for cervical screening?

Your choices include:

- your usual doctor or nurse at a GP clinic, if you have one
- Māori, Pacific or women's community health centres
- outreach services, like marae or mobile units
- Family Planning clinics
- sexual health services.

Some healthcare providers may offer a take-home option, talk to them if this is of interest to you.

You may take a support person with you to your appointment. When booking, mention if you need an interpreter or if you have a disability that means you need support.

## How often do I need cervical screening?

Cervical screening is recommended every 5 years for most people (or 3-yearly if you are immune deficient). In some circumstances, you may need to have a test more often. Your healthcare provider will discuss this with you if you do.

The screening gap is safe because if you don't have HPV, your risk of developing cell changes that may lead to cancer is very low. However, it is important to continue to have regular screening as long as you remain eligible.

## HPV and cervical cancer

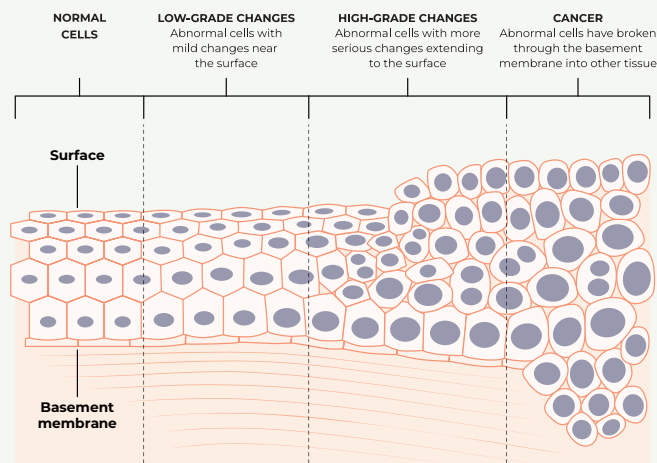
Almost all cervical cancer is caused by HPV. The virus is very common and is spread by intimate skin-to-skin contact or any sexual activity (not just penetrative sex).

Most adults, who have been sexually active, will have HPV at some time in their lives. The body usually clears the virus, but some types can persist and go on to cause cell changes that may, over time, turn into cancer.

Having HPV does not mean you have cancer.

Cervical cancer usually takes 10 or more years to develop. There are many stages between getting the virus, cell changes and cancer. Regular screening can find cell changes early so they can be treated before they become cancer.

**Figure 1. Grades of cervical cell changes**



# The HPV screening test

Cervical screening has never been easier. There are two ways to do the test:

## OPTION 1: Vaginal swab

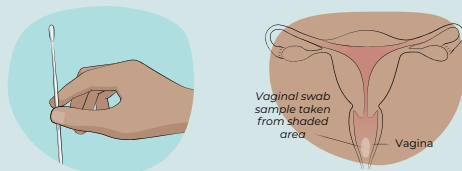
This will be suitable for most people. You will be advised if a different test is appropriate for you.

### A) You can do it as a self-test

Usually done in a private area at your screening appointment. Some screen-takers may offer community-based locations, a mobile unit, or a take-home option.

### B) A trained health professional can assist you

A sample is collected from your vagina using a swab. The vaginal swab sample is tested only for HPV.



### If HPV is not found

Your next screening test will be in 5 years (or 3 years if you are immune deficient).

### If HPV is found

Depending on the type of HPV detected, you may need to have a cervical sample taken (what used to be called a smear test) to check for any cell changes or you may be referred to colposcopy to see if there are any changes to the cervix that may need treatment.

See instructions  
[CervicalSelfTest.nz](https://www.cervicalselftest.nz)



## OPTION 2: Cervical sample

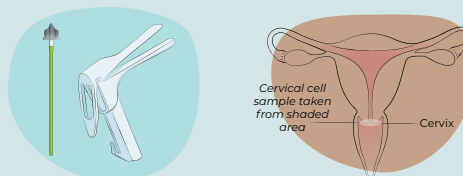
Previously called a smear test. This may be recommended for some people, and you can still choose this option if you prefer.

### A cervical sample is taken by a trained health professional

This can be done in clinical or community-based locations, or in a mobile unit.

Your screen-taker will take a sample of cells from your cervix using a speculum and small brush.

The sample is first tested for HPV and, if HPV is found, it will also be checked for cell changes.



### If HPV is not found

Your next screening test will be in 5 years (or 3 years if you are immune deficient).

### If HPV is found

The same sample will be checked for any cell changes. Depending on the results, you may be referred to colposcopy to see if there are any changes to the cervix that may need treatment.

See guide  
[CervicalSample.nz](https://www.cervicalsample.nz)



## Getting your result

Your HPV result will usually come back within 1 to 2 weeks. Talk to your healthcare provider about how you'd like to be contacted.

**Most test results are normal. Around 90% of people screened won't have HPV found.**

About 10% will have HPV found. **This does NOT mean you have cancer.** It may mean there is a risk of having or developing precancerous cell changes on the cervix, so further checks are important.

The HPV test is very sensitive and accurate at detecting the virus that causes most cervical cancers. The test is just as good whether you do it yourself, get your healthcare provider to help, or have a cervical sample taken. However, no test is perfect and there's a very small chance that HPV or cell changes could be missed. That's why it is so important to have regular screening.

To learn more about cervical test results, see the pamphlet *Cervical Screening: Understanding test results*, code HE1162

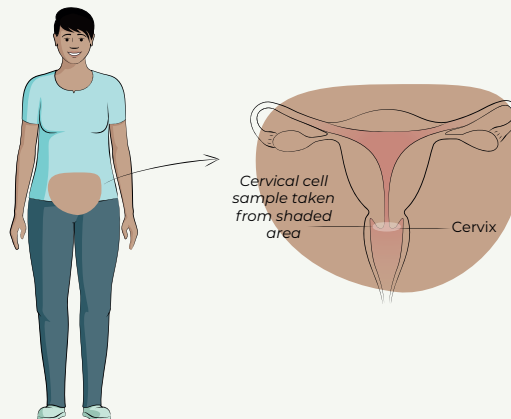
## Follow-up tests – what to expect

### • Cervical sample

An instrument called a speculum is used to open the vagina so the doctor or nurse can see the cervix. You may either lie on your side or on your back with your knees bent. The lower part of your body will be covered with a sheet. A soft brush is used to gently take a sample of cells from the surface. This can feel a little uncomfortable.

Your sample is then sent to a lab to be checked for cell changes.

Figure 2. Where the sample is taken from



### • Colposcopy

During a colposcopy, a specialist uses a microscope, called a colposcope, to check the cells on your cervix. The colposcope looks like a pair of binoculars on a stand. It magnifies the cervix so that any cell changes can be seen.

The examination may include taking a small sample of tissue (a biopsy). The biopsy takes only a couple of seconds and may be a bit uncomfortable.

It is important to attend your colposcopy appointment even if you don't have any symptoms, and/or you are pregnant.

These extra checks may not find anything to be concerned about. If cell changes are found, you will be offered treatment, which is usually highly successful.



**With vaccination and  
HPV testing, Aotearoa  
New Zealand aims to eliminate  
cervical cancer in the future.  
Together we can do this!**

## The HPV vaccine

HPV vaccination is an important step in protecting against cervical cancer. The vaccine is free for everyone aged 9 to 26 years, including non-residents under 18. HPV vaccination has led to a drop in cervical cancer rates, but it doesn't protect against all types of HPV. Even if you've had the vaccine, it's still important to have regular cervical screening.



## An important message

Cervical screening is for people who don't have symptoms. If you're having any symptoms, it is important to see a healthcare provider without delay. Symptoms could include:

- bleeding or spotting between periods or after your periods have stopped (after menopause)
- pain during sex and/or bleeding or spotting after sex
- vaginal discharge that's not normal for you
- persistent pain in your pelvis or lower back.

These symptoms can happen for many reasons and rarely mean you have cervical cancer. However, it is important to get them checked.

## How do I join the National Cervical Screening Programme?

You automatically become part of the Programme, if you are eligible, when you turn 25 or have your first cervical screening test, unless you have chosen to withdraw.



You need to be on the NCSP-Register to get an invitation, recalls and reminders to screen. If you are not sure if you are on the Register, call **0800 729 729** to check.

## What happens to my health information?

Information is stored on a computer system, called the NCSP-Register, which is managed by Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand. The NCSP-Register is used to record your test results. This helps ensure important information is available to you and your healthcare providers and to manage your progress through the Programme. It also:

- sends out recalls and reminders
- supports you if you need support accessing cervical screening services
- provides information to enable evaluation and review of the Programme
- enables research, approved by an ethics committee
- helps with planning for national and regional services.

No reports or research produced will identify any individual.

You can look at the privacy section on the Time to Screen website for full details about how information collected by the Programme is securely managed.

You have a right to request your health information at any time by freephoning **0800 729 729** or emailing **info@ncspregister.health.nz**, and verifying your identity (full name, date of birth, NHI, address).



## Pausing screening or withdrawing from the NCSP

You can choose to withdraw from the NCSP at any time, or you can remain on the Register but opt out of receiving any communications. You can contact the Programme about either of these options and if you decide to withdraw, we will send you a form to complete. You can also find the form on our website. We will keep some of your identity details in our system with a note not to contact you again. All information about your cervical screening tests and history will be removed from our records.

You can re-join the Programme any time if you change your mind.

## More information

If you have any further questions about the benefits of cervical screening and your options, you can usually find the answers on our website **TimeToCervicalScreen.nz**

This brochure and other cervical screening information are available from **HealthEd.govt.nz**, including these helpful resources:

- *Cervical Screening: Understanding test results, code HE1162*
- *Colposcopy: What you need to know, code HE1163*
- *Cervical screening self-test - What you need to know, code HE1165.*

For more information and to make sure your contact details are up-to-date, talk to your healthcare provider or the NCSP-Register. Freephone **0800 729 729** or email **info@ncspregister.health.nz**

**Ma te mōhio e piki ai te hauora  
me te waiora. Knowledge  
improves health and wellbeing.**





**TimeToCervicalScreen.nz**



National  
Cervical  
Screening  
Programme

**Te Whatu Ora**  
Health New Zealand

**Te Aka Whai Ora**  
Māori Health Authority

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