

Cervical Screening

Your test, your choice

HPV and cervical cancer

Almost all cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). The virus is very common and is spread by intimate skin-to-skin contact or any sexual activity. Almost all adults will have HPV at some stage in their lives.

While most cases of HPV usually clear up by themselves, some can persist and go on to cause cell changes that may in time turn into cancer. The virus can sometimes also stay dormant in your system and may not be detected until years after you come into contact with it. If found in a test, this may not be due to a new exposure to HPV. For these reasons, regular ongoing screening is important even if you have been with the same partner or not been sexually active for some time.

It usually takes 10 years or more for cervical cancer to develop. Regular screening can find people at increased risk of developing cell changes so that if changes happen, they can be treated, often before they become cancer.

There are many stages between HPV infection, cell changes and cancer. Having HPV does not mean you have cancer.

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. Together, HPV immunisation and regular screening offer your best protection against developing cervical cancer.

Around 90% of people screened will NOT have HPV found and can just continue to have regular screening. About 10% of people screened will have HPV and will need further checks.

About cervical screening

Along with being vaccinated against HPV, regular cervical screening reduces illness and death from cervical cancer. Being part of the National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP) and having regular screening is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer so you can stay healthy for yourself and your family.

There's now a quick and easy cervical screening test that most people will only need every 5 years, with an option of doing it as a self-test.

The HPV test is very sensitive and accurate at detecting the virus that causes most cervical cancers. It will identify the 10% of those screened who are at increased risk of developing precancerous cervical cell changes; allowing early treatment and preventing more cervical cancers.

The new method of cervical screening looks for a common virus called human papillomavirus (HPV) which causes more than 95% of 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.

How do I know if I need screening?

You are recommended to have screening if you are:

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

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.

Your HPV testing options

There are two options for how a cervical screening test can be done. Your sample can be taken either as a vaginal swab (which can be done as a self-test or with help from a healthcare provider), or as a cervical sample (what used to be known as a smear test).

HPV test option 1: Vaginal swab

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

A self-test is 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.

If you prefer to have the screen-taker assist with taking the vaginal swab, just tell your healthcare provider when you have your appointment.

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

If HPV is found, depending on the type 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 need treatment.

If HPV is not found, your next screening will be in 5 years (or 3 years if you are immune deficient).

More information about the vaginal swab test is available at www.CervicalSelfTest.nz

HPV test 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 healthcare professional. This can be done in a clinic, in a community-based location, or in a mobile unit.

Your screen-taker will take a sample of cells from your cervix using a speculum and a small brush. The sample is first tested for HPV.

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 changes to the cervix that need treatment.

If HPV is not found, your next screening will be in 5 years (or 3 years if you are immune deficient).

More information about the cervical sample is available at www.CervicalSample.nz

How do I join the 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.

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**.

Do I qualify for free 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 (as part of a full consult visit).

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.

Find out more

For more information about the Programme, HPV and cervical cancer, your options, and where to book an appointment:

- visit www.TimeToCervicalScreen.nz or
- **freephone: 0800 729 729** from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am – 1pm Saturday; or
- **email:** screening@health.govt.nz

If you are Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, speech impaired or find it hard to talk, you can use the New Zealand Relay Service: www.nzrelay.co.nz

End of information: Cervical Screening | Your test, your choice

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