

About your cervical screening (smear test)

Going for screening could save your life.

STOP Cancer, before it starts

This leaflet is available in Easy Read, BSL, audio and large print.

www.cervicalscreeningwales.wales.nhs.uk

This leaflet tells you about cervical cancer and NHS cervical screening.

- Cervical screening can prevent cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Women aged 25 to 64 are invited every three or five years.
- Most women will get a normal result.
- Some women will need more tests.
- Going for your screening could save your life.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix.

Every year around 160 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Wales. It is the most common cancer in women under the age of 35. Cervical screening can

prevent cervical cancer from developing, or pick it up at an early stage.

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (**HPV**). This is a very common virus that most people will have at some time during their life.

Only certain types of HPV cause cervical cancer. These are called high-risk types. These types of HPV can cause the cells on your cervix to change, and these changes can develop into cervical cancer.

HPV can be passed on through any type of sexual contact with a man or woman. You or your partner could have had HPV for some time without knowing about it.

Can HPV be treated?

There is no treatment to get rid of HPV. For most women, their immune system will deal with the virus. Most types of cervical cancer take a long time to develop. Treating cell changes early means that cervical cancer can be prevented.

What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening is also known as the smear test. The cervical screening test will look for high-risk types of HPV that can cause cell changes. By finding cell changes early, screening can prevent cervical cancer from developing.

Women aged between 25 and 64 years old are invited for cervical screening. Women aged 25 to 49 years are invited **every three years**, and women aged 50 to 64 years are invited **every five years**.

If you are transgender and have a cervix, it is still important that you have cervical screening.

Your letter will ask you to book an appointment. You can have your cervical screening at your doctor's surgery or at some sexual health clinics. If you would like to be seen by a female nurse or doctor, you can ask when booking your appointment.

About the test

The cervical screening test only takes about **five minutes** and is usually carried out by a nurse in a private room. Try to make an appointment for when you will not be having your period.

- You will be asked to undress from the waist down. It may be easier to wear a skirt or dress.
- You will need to lie on your back on a couch with your knees bent and your legs open.
- The nurse will gently put a speculum (medical instrument) into your vagina so they can see your cervix.
- They will then gently brush cells from the cervix using a soft brush.
- The cells will be tested for high-risk HPV. If high-risk HPV is found, the sample will be looked at for cell changes.

The test should not be painful but some women may find it uncomfortable. Tell your nurse if it is very painful. You can stop the test at any time.

Some women have light bleeding after the test. This can be normal and does not mean anything is wrong.

- It can be normal to feel embarrassed about having cervical screening, especially at your first appointment. Remember, your nurse carries out screening tests every day.
- If you have never had sex, talk to your practice nurse to help you decide if you want to have screening.
- Even if you have not had any sexual activity for a long time, it is still important you go for screening.
- You can still get HPV if you only have one sexual partner.
- You can take somebody with you for support.

Your result

You will receive your results letter in the post within four weeks of having your cervical screening. Your result will also be sent to your doctor. Listed below are the possible results from HPV primary screening:

- 9 out of 10 results show no high-risk HPV.

No high-risk HPV found (HPV negative).

This is a reassuring result and we do not need to look at your cells for changes as you are at very low risk of developing cervical cancer. We will send you another invitation in **three or five years' time**, depending on your age.

High-risk HPV found (HPV positive) but no cell changes.

If you have high-risk HPV, we will look at your sample for cell changes. If no cell changes are found, you will be invited for a repeat test in **12 months'** time.

High-risk HPV found (HPV positive) and cell changes.

If you have high-risk HPV and cell changes we will refer you for colposcopy at your local hospital. Colposcopy is a closer examination of your cervix.

Inadequate result

This means the laboratory was unable to give a reliable result. The screening test will need to be repeated after three months.

If you have any questions, or are worried about your result, contact Cervical Screening Wales or your practice nurse.

Important information about cervical screening

Benefits

- Cervical screening can save lives by preventing cervical cancer from developing.
- Screening saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK.
- Screening can pick up changes to your cells even if you look and feel healthy.

Risks

- Screening does not prevent all cervical cancers.
- You might be worried about going for cervical screening, talk to your doctor or nurse for support.
- Some hospital treatments for cell changes may affect future pregnancies. Women who get pregnant after having treatment are slightly more likely to have their baby one to two months early.

What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

Early cervical cancer often has no symptoms. You should tell your doctor if you have any of the following, even if you have had a normal screening test.

- Bleeding between periods, during or after sex or after the menopause (after your periods have stopped)
- Unusual vaginal discharge

Smoking and risk of cervical cancer

Women who smoke have twice the risk of developing cervical cancer than women who do not smoke. For free help to stop smoking call Help Me Quit on 0800 085 2219 or visit www.helpmequit.wales

Further information

If you have any questions about cervical screening, or would like information in Easy Read, British Sign Language (BSL), audio or large print, contact your local screening office or visit:

www.cervicalscreeningwales.wales.nhs.uk

South East: 02920 787910/11

Mid and West: 01792 940940

North: 01352 700227

It is your choice whether to have screening or not. If you decide you don't want any more invitations, you can opt out by contacting your local screening office.

Visit Cervical Screening Wales' website for information on

- What happens to your sample after you have been screened,
- and how we use patient information safely and securely.

For further information and support, visit:

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust

www.jostrust.org.uk