

HPV CERVICAL SCREENING NEWSLETTER

January 2021

European Cervical Cancer Prevention Week 2021

This week is Cervical Cancer Prevention Week (18-24 January).

CervicalCheck - the National Cervical Screening Programme - is calling on women to learn about why we are now testing for the HPV virus, and providing them with the information to help them choose cervical screening.

We are asking women to explore our new information about HPV cervical screening on www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck

We know that women are seeking to understand more about HPV screening, and why we are no longer checking for cell changes in the first instance. In the past, we screened for these abnormal cells using the smear or 'cytology' test. If we found cell changes, we treated them, in case these cell changes developed into cancer.

We know know that nearly all cervical cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). If we find a HPV infection early, we can monitor it and offer treatment if there are any changes to cells in the cervix.

If 1,000 women are screened, 980 will be at low risk of developing cervical cancer. About 20 will have abnormal (pre-cancerous) cervical cells, which may develop into cancer if left untreated. The old smear test picked up 15 of these 20 women. However, HPV cervical screening picks up 18 of these 20 women. This means that HPV screening works for more people than the old smear test did. With HPV screening we will pick up more people at risk of developing cervical cancer.



CervicalCheck Clinical Director, Dr Nóirín Russell said: "This is an important time for cervical cancer screening in Ireland. We have changed to primary HPV screening which means that there will be more women whose cervical cancer is prevented. Unfortunately, there is no screening test which prevents all cancers. There will always be women who develop cervical cancer after a negative screening test. We are looking forward to working with the 221+ Group and others to inform us on how best to care for women who develop these interval cancers each year."

Dr Russell said it was important to remember that screening is for well women, and that anyone with symptoms should not wait for screening but should contact their GP straight away. "I would encourage all those with symptoms of cervical cancer – such as bleeding between periods, abnormal discharge and pain after intercourse - to call their GP immediately and they will arrange appropriate care for you."

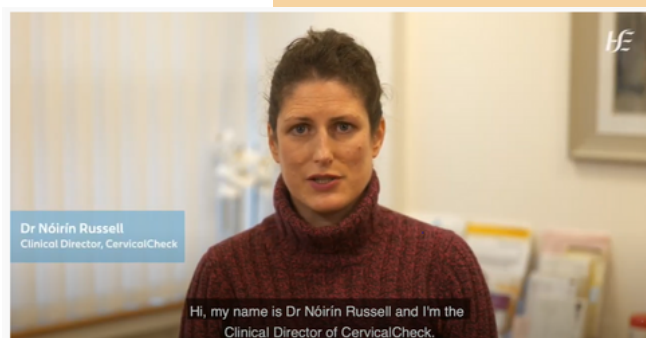
Dr Russell said that CervicalCheck was working with the National Women and Infants Health Programme to ensure better access to emergency gynaecology clinics for women with symptoms. "This will ensure that CervicalCheck can continue to provide high quality, timely care to women who attend for screening."

CervicalCheck is this week also emphasising the importance of coming for screening when you are due.

We are asking women to check the register on www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck and if they are due an appointment, to book one with a screening provider, even if the appointment is a few weeks away. We know that due to the large number of COVID-19 cases in recent weeks, it may take longer for some people to get a cervical screening appointment. We are informing women that they can book for screening with any of our registered providers, a list of which is available on www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck

Our messages during this week will continue to highlight that HPV cervical screening is the best way to see if someone is at risk of developing cervical cancer in the future.

- We have developed a new video with Dr Nóirín Russell, Clinical Director, CervicalCheck, [discussing HPV cervical screening](#).
- We will communicate and engage with our 25-65 year old audience through multiple communications channels: social media, video on demand, digital display and online articles, which you can view on Journal.ie and Independent.ie. These channels are supported by our ongoing paid search ads.
- Our paid media will be supported by a press release and interviews with a number of media outlets.



Screening and level 5 lockdown

General practice and community-based clinics are under COVID-related pressure. As a result, some might not be in a position to offer cervical screening appointments, or may be operating at reduced capacity. The programme continues to support those clinics making individual decisions about the level of screening that is safe for them to provide at this time.

- We are advising those seeking an appointment with their GP or clinic that this might not be possible at this time; we are asking them to keep in contact with their GP or clinic and rebook as soon as they can.
- We are notifying women that they do not need to book with their own GP, and that a list of registered screeners is available on our website, www.hse/cervicalcheck.ie
- Colposcopy clinics are continuing to work at capacity to see women referred for treatment. A few clinics are seeing priority referrals only at this time. Where possible, they are combining resources with other local clinics to offer further follow-up care.

Multilingual video messages

The National Screening Service has teamed up with Translate Ireland to produce multilingual video messages for migrants on CervicalCheck screening. The video messages, which will be available in a dozen languages, are presented by doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals in Ireland who come from another country originally.

The video messages explain the importance of screening, inform them on where and how to book a test, and what screening entails. The script for the video messages is culturally appropriate and clearly explains information which may be difficult for migrants to understand in English.

The video messages are available [here](#) and on Translatelreland.ie. Over the coming days they will be also uploaded to the CervicalCheck website.

The video messages on CervicalCheck are available in Polish, Portuguese, Arabic, English, Romanian, Russian, French, Urdu, Spanish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Slovak and are available from Monday, January 18 the first day of European Cervical Cancer Prevention Week.



TRANSLATE
IRELAND
MULTILINGUAL VIDEO MESSAGING



Completing the cervical screening form

By completing the form cervical screening form correctly you can ensure the results and payment of each sample is assigned to the correct contract holder.

Each practice has a contract/or multiple contract holder with CervicalCheck who is paid for the screening tests taken at the practice. They are referred to as the **'Clinically Responsible Doctor (CRD)'** - which means they are clinically responsible for all cervical screening services performed at the practice, and are paid for those services.

In each practice there are also **Qualified Persons (QPs)**, these are doctors and nurses who are registered with CervicalCheck as sampletakers and work under the clinical supervision/guidance of the CRD.

It is the responsibility of the CRD to ensure that each member of staff that is performing screening tests under their contract are:

- Registered with CervicalCheck as a Qualified Person associated with their contract. This allows each test taken by any qualified person in the practice to be identified as connected to the contract holders' MCRN, and ensure the results and payment are assigned to them.

To register one or more qualified health professionals with CervicalCheck:

- Print out and fill in a registration form for each health professional - there is a form for GP practices and a different form for clinics, see here.
- Return a completed form to the CervicalCheck Programme Office.
- Only a GP, doctor, medical director or clinical director who has signed a contract with CervicalCheck can register another health professional to provide screening services. Health professionals include GPs, assistant GPs, nurses and trainee GPs.

All health professionals must be registered with either the Medical Council or the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland.

If a practice has more than one contract holder then each qualified health professional must complete a registration form with each of the contract holder at the practice. This ensures the result and payment is assigned to the correct contract holder.

If the practice is using pre-populated CervicalCheck Screening Forms from a GP software package it is the responsibility of the surgery to ensure all of the above is correctly entered on the pre-populated form.

Sampletaker details on form should be: Name and MCRN/NMBI number of the person taking the sample. If the contract holder is taking the sample it will be their name and MCRN number.

Expired vials



Expired vials continue to be submitted to the laboratory, where they cannot be processed. We have had over 600 expired vials in 2020. This means the sample was sent in an out-of-date vial and the test could not be processed. As a result a participant must have a repeat screening test in the minimum interval of 3 months.

Sampletakers undertaking cervical screening must ensure that the sample vials used do not expire before reaching the laboratory or before being processed. **Please note that practices will have vials with an expiry date of 08 February 2021. These should not be used.**

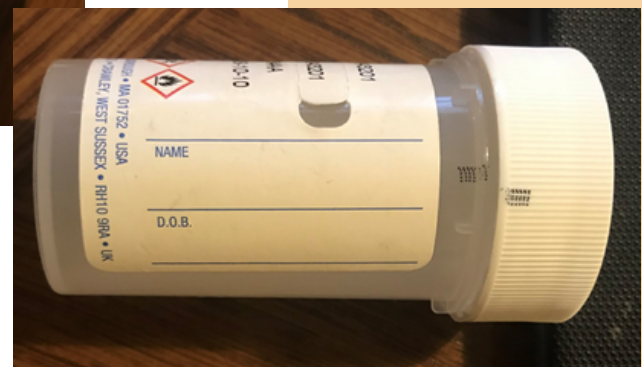
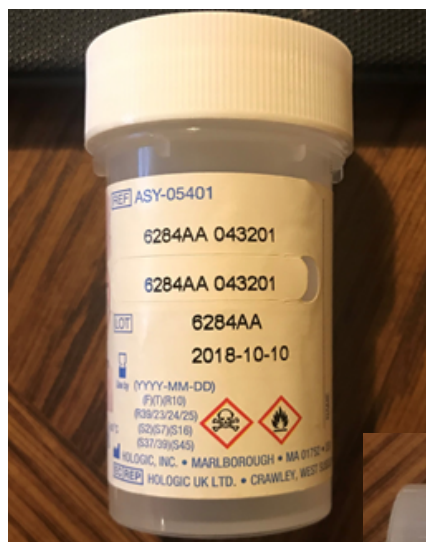
Remember:

- To dispose of out-of-date sample vials. Any sample taken in out-of-date vials cannot be processed. This is because the laboratory cannot guarantee results from an expired vial.
- To dispatch screening test samples at least once a week. The vial must be within 2 weeks of expiry date when received by the laboratory.
- No payment is made for screening tests that are in expired vials.
- Check and rotate your stock. Test kits that are received first should be used first (FIFO - First In First Out). Newly received test kits should be stocked behind older supplies, so the older stock is used first.

Blank vials

A large number of blank vials have also been returned to the lab. Please remember that the vial has two barcodes on it:

1. The detachable barcode label on the vial must be placed on the Cervical Screening Form
2. in addition you must record the surname, forename and date of birth on the vial.



If a vial does not contain all this information then it will be delayed and runs the risk of expiring.

Final reminder letter

[fullname]
[address1]
[address2]
[address3]
[address4]
[address5]

[system_date]

Cervical Screening Programme ID: [csp_id]
PPS No: [PPSN]

Free Cervical Screening Test – Final Reminder

Dear [Surname]

Did you forget? This is your final reminder to make an appointment for your free HPV (human papillomavirus) cervical screening test (formerly smear test). You can make this appointment with any GP (doctor) or nurse registered with CervicalCheck. A list of registered doctors or nurses is available on hse.ie/cervicalcheck.

Having regular cervical screening is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of cervical cancer. HPV cervical screening was introduced in Ireland in early 2020. Though there is no difference in the way it is collected, your sample is first tested for HPV – the virus that causes most cases of cervical cancer. If HPV is found, the same test sample is checked to see if you have any abnormal (pre-cancerous) cells in your cervix.

HPV cervical screening is a more effective screening method but all screening has limitations. Attending screening regularly is important because no screening test is 100% accurate. For every 1,000 people screened, 20 will have abnormal cell changes. HPV cervical screening will identify about 18 of those people. About 2 will still develop cervical cancer despite having screening. Cervical cancer is a rare outcome of HPV infection. However, you should always pay attention to possible symptoms such as irregular vaginal bleeding, pelvic pain, spotting or unusual discharge and go to your doctor if you have any symptoms.

In 2021, programme participants on ordinary recall will receive **one** invitation letter and **one final** reminder letter only.

This will be clearly indicated on their appointment letter and on their final reminder letter. Participants continue to be eligible to book without a letter, if they are due.

CervicalCheck hopes to begin this process in the coming weeks.

We thank you also for actively reminding patients they are due their screening test.

Frequently asked questions

If you have completed our e-learning module on HPV cervical screening and have further questions, you might want to read our FAQ document which is available on NSS Resources [here](#).

Age extension in the cervical screening programme

CervicalCheck now screens people aged 25 to 65 every 3 or 5 years, depending on their age (those above 30 are screened in five year intervals).

Prior to the transition to HPV cervical screening in March 2020, CervicalCheck screened people aged 25 to 60. The increase in the age range from 60 to 65 will mean a greater number of post-menopausal women will potentially be screened.

Please note if a woman's 61st birthday was before 30 March 2020 her screening journey is now completed. She will not receive an additional invitation. A person's sampletaker can check their eligibility within this extended age limit.

A person can ask their GP for a free screening test if they have never been screened before and are under 65.

Why do some people not clear HPV from their system?

As far as the immune system is concerned, the simple answer is we don't know for sure why some people don't clear HPV like others do. There has been research done on persistence but it remains inconclusive. The reason for persistence can be related to viral factors and factors relating to the individual.

There is evidence that some of the genotypes tend to be more persistent (but still the majority of women clear them). Also, women who have more than one genotype at a time might take longer to clear them. There is mixed evidence on whether having already contracted a strain of HPV makes it more or less likely that you will clear another strain. It's possible that those with two genotypes may have had persistence of one genotype, and then acquired another. In this case the body's overall response is still the key, rather than the response being a factor of having two strains of the virus. It is the immune system's job to clear the virus.

However, just because your body does not clear the virus, it does not mean there is something wrong with your immune system - it just hasn't managed to deal with this virus. For example, it is similar to the fact that some people get every cold that's going and some people get far fewer colds. Fundamentally, their immune system is probably fine, it just doesn't manage colds well.

Is there a blood test that can be used to see if there is active HPV in our system and what strain if any?

CervicalCheck aims to reduce the number of people in Ireland who develop cervical cancer. Screening first looks to see if you have any of the high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause cervical cancer by taking small sample of cells from your cervix. If HPV is found, the sample will also be checked for abnormal cells.

There is no available blood test that can detect HPV in the system. This is because HPV is a skin or mucous membrane virus that affects the body locally, at a specific site. It doesn't affect the entire body (this is sometimes called a (systemic infection) so it is not detected in the blood.

Scientists are however looking at how we might detect antibodies to HPV. This means they are not detecting the virus in the blood but are looking at how our immune system responds to the virus. If successful, it could tell doctors whether your body has been exposed to HPV. However, this test is only at the beginning of the research phase and it will be some time before it is ready to be considered for any possible use.

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