



Clinical guidance note: The use of Lubricants, Moisturisers and Vaginal Oestrogen in Cervical Screening: Best Practice Guidance

Purpose: To provide guidance on the appropriate use of vaginal products when taking a cervical screening test.

Why use lubricant?

Cervical screening can be uncomfortable for many women and painful for some. Using a small amount of lubricant can ease discomfort, reduce anxiety, and improve the overall experience.

Which lubricant should you use?

Always choose a **carbomer-free lubricant**, as products containing carbomers can interfere with the sample and risk producing invalid results.

Common lubricants available in Ireland include:

Carbomer- free products	Carbomer containing products
HR Lubricating Jelly	DynaLube Lubricating Jelly
KY Jelly	McKesson Lubricating Jelly
Surgilube Surgical Lubricating Jelly	Cardinal Health Lubricating Jelly
Jedmon HealthCare Plus Lubricating Jelly	Medline Lubricating Jelly

Key message:

These carbomer-free lubricants are safe to use with cervical screening samples when used correctly.

Do not use water as a lubricant.

Water does not provide adequate lubrication, evaporates quickly, and can actually increase discomfort for women during the test.

How to apply lubricant properly:

- Use minimal amounts (pea sized amount) too much can interfere with the sample.
- Apply only to the outside portion of the speculum, avoiding the tip and the area that will contact the cervix or the sampling device.

Vaginal creams, pessaries, and other feminine hygiene products

Advice for women before cervical screening

Be aware that many women use vaginal products and should be advised to avoid using any vaginal creams, pessaries, medicines, or moisturisers (lubricant) for two days before their screening appointment, as these products can sometimes affect the accuracy of their cervical screening test.





Examples of feminine hygiene products available in Ireland include:

Carbomer-free products	Products containing carbomers
Conceptrol Contraceptive Gel	RepHresh Clean Balance
Labigam Anti-fungal	RepHresh Vaginal Gel Prefilled
Luvena Moisturiser	Vagisil Anti-itch Cream
Monistat 1	Vagisil Crème Regular Strength
Terrasil Ointment Plus Cleansing Bar	Vagisil ProHydrate
VCF Contraceptive Foam	Vagisil Sensitive Cream
Clotrimazole 3	IsoLove Balancing Gel
Clotrimazole Vaginal Cream	Replens Long-Lasting Vaginal Moisturiser
	Metronidazole Vaginal Gel

Key message:

Advise women to avoid using products containing carbomer for 48 hours before their screening test to ensure a high-quality sample is obtained. If it is unclear whether a product is carbomer-free, it is best to avoid using any products for 48 hours prior to the test.

Women over 50 - reducing discomfort and improving sampling

During menopause and in post-menopausal women, lower levels of oestrogen cause thinning, dryness, and inflammation of vaginal tissues, known as **Genitourinary Syndrome of Menopause (GSM)**. This can make cervical screening more uncomfortable and, in some cases, affect the adequacy of the sample

Prescribing according to NICE guidelines (NG23)

Treatment regimen:

- Used **nightly for two weeks**, then reduced to **2–3 times per week** depending on severity and **stop 2 days prior** to sample taking.
- There is no restriction on duration of use; it can be continued for years if needed.

Important advice for sample takers:

- Discuss vaginal oestrogen use routinely for symptomatic women. Many women are unaware GSM is treatable and may have avoided screening due to pain or embarrassment.
- Explain the importance of stopping treatment two days before screening to reduce the risk of sample contamination or inaccurate results.
- Allow time for treatment to work. Symptoms can take up to three months to improve fully, so advise early initiation before scheduled screening.
- **Reassure about safety.** Vaginal oestrogen is low dose with minimal systemic absorption, safe even for women on systemic HRT.
- **Be aware of contraindications.** Avoid prescribing to women with **current active breast cancer or undiagnosed vaginal bleeding**. Refer to GP or specialist as appropriate.