CervicalCheck
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME

Important information about your free HPV cervical screening

What is a cervical screening test?

The cervix is the opening to your womb from your vagina.

A cervical screening test is a test to see if you are at greater risk of developing cancer of the cervix. It's not a test for cancer.

Cervical screening is one of the best ways to protect yourself from cervical cancer so do not delay in doing this test every time one is due.

What is HPV cervical screening?

HPV cervical screening was introduced in Ireland in 2020.

Your cervical screening sample is first checked for human papillomavirus (HPV) – a virus that causes 9 out of 10 cervical cancers.

If HPV is found, the same test sample is checked to see if you have any abnormal (pre-cancerous) cell changes in your cervix.

This way of screening:

- prevents more cancers
- means some people will have fewer tests

Who should have cervical screening?

We offer screening to all eligible women and people with a cervix, living in the Republic of Ireland, between the ages of 25 and 65.

If you have had a total hysterectomy or you are not sure if you need HPV cervical screening, contact your GP (doctor) or clinic to find out.

Cervical screening and pregnancy

A cervical screening test is not usually recommended while you're pregnant. This is because pregnancy hormones can make it harder to get clear results. You'll usually be told to wait until at least 3 months after you've given birth to have your next test.

If you are trying to get pregnant, you do not need a screening test unless you are due.

When we will invite you for screening

- If you are aged 25 to 29, we will invite you for cervical screening every 3 years.
- If you are aged 30 to 65, we will invite you for cervical screening every 5 years.
- We invite you for screening more often from the age of 25 to 30 because you may be more likely to have HPV.
- Some people will require screening more often. We'll tell you if you do.

Not a test for cancer

A screening test looks to see if you might be at risk of developing cancer in the future. This is why it can be effective in reducing the risk of cancer.

Like all screening tests, cervical screening tests are for people who do not have any symptoms of cervical cancer. See page 14 for symptoms of cervical cancer. Women with symptoms should discuss them with their GP.

Like all screening tests, HPV cervical screening will not detect all abnormalities.

Some people will still develop cervical cancer despite having screening. Going for regular HPV cervical screening is one of the best ways to protect yourself from cervical cancer.

What is HPV?

HPV is the name for a common group of viruses. There are more than 100 types of HPV and 14 of these have been identified as the types that can cause cervical cancer.

You can get HPV from any kind of sexual or skin-to-skin contact of the genital area, not just penetrative sex.

Most people will have HPV at some time in their lives. Most people's immune system clears HPV from their body in 1 to 2 years.

For most people, the virus goes away on its own and does not cause any harm. But in some cases, the HPV virus can persist and cause changes in the body's cells that can cause cancer.

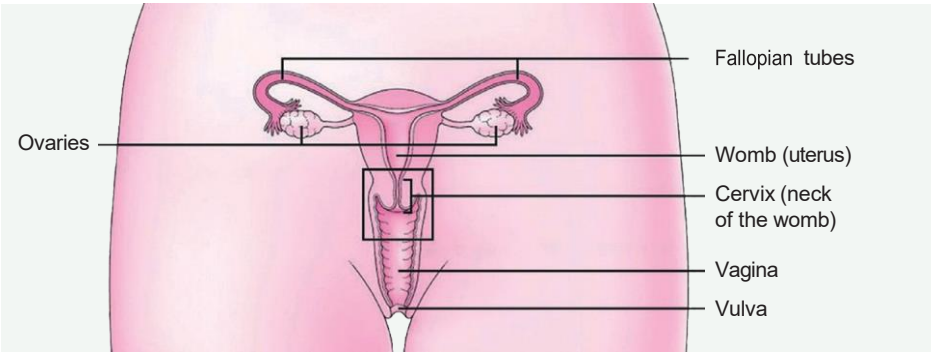
This is why it is important to attend regular cervical screening when it is due.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a cancer of the cervix. It happens when cells in the cervix become abnormal – usually because of a persistent HPV infection – and change slowly over time.

In most cases it takes 15 to 20 years for these cells to go from normal to abnormal to cancer. Because the cells change at a slow rate, regular HPV cervical screening can help detect these changes early.

See page 14 for symptoms of cervical cancer.



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How do I arrange a cervical screening test?

- If you are on our register (list), we will send you a letter to invite you to make an appointment with a GP (doctor) or clinic registered with CervicalCheck.
- Check our register online at hse.ie/cervicalcheck to find a list of registered GPs and clinics in your area.
- If you or someone you care for has a disability or needs additional support to take part in CervicalCheck email access@cervicalcheck.ie or call our Freephone number 1800 45 45 55.
- You do not need to be on our register or to receive a letter to have a test. If your screening test is due or you missed your last cervical screening test, you can go ahead and make an appointment with your GP or clinic.
- It is best to have a HPV cervical screening test when you are not having your period.

What are the benefits of cervical screening?

Regular HPV cervical screening:

- can save lives
- can find HPV which can cause abnormal cells in the cervix
- can find abnormal cell changes before symptoms of cervical cancer develop
- can find abnormal cell changes when they are easy to treat

Finding and treating abnormal cells early is the best way to prevent cervical cancer developing.

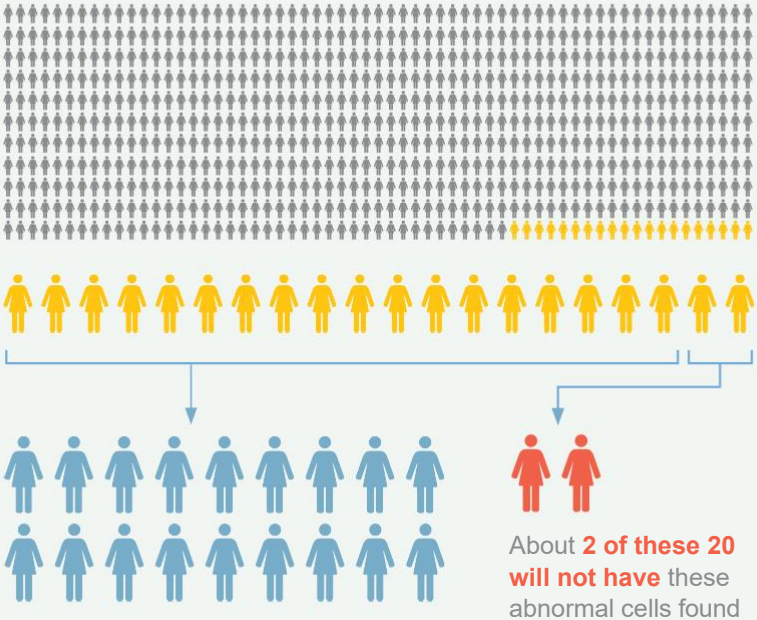
This is why having regular screening tests is important. It's one of the best ways to protect yourself from cervical cancer, so do not delay having a cervical screening test every time it's due.

What are the limitations of cervical screening?

The main limitations of cervical screening are:

- cervical screening will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer
- some people will still develop cervical cancer despite regular screening
- some abnormal cell changes may be missed
- screening will not find every abnormal cell change
- sometimes test results are not accurate. See page 10 for information on false negative and false positive results

For every 1,000 people screened, about **20** will have abnormal cervical cells



About **18 of these 20 will have** these abnormal cells found through screening

About **2 of these 20 will not have** these abnormal cells found through screening and may develop cancer

Why are some abnormal cell changes missed?

Your sample will be checked for HPV first. If HPV is found, it will also be checked for abnormal cells.

Not everyone who develops cervical cancer will have HPV found at screening.

Not all cervical cancers are caused by HPV, and neither HPV nor cytology screening is effective at detecting them.

A negative HPV test – one where no HPV was found – also does not mean you won't have HPV found in the future. This is why it is important to come for your next test when it is due.

Abnormal cells can also be missed. This is because:

- sometimes abnormal cells can look similar to normal cells
- there may be very few abnormal cells in the sample
- the person reading your sample may miss the abnormality (this happens occasionally, no matter how experienced they are)

No test in any screening programme will find every person who has abnormal cervical cells.

Why is it important to attend regular cervical screening?

Cervical cancer takes many years to develop. In most cases, it takes 15 to 20 years for cells to go from normal to abnormal to cancer.

If HPV was found in your sample, you will have a repeat test in 12 months. If you have two HPV positive tests, we will refer you for a colposcopy.

This is why you should always attend your cervical screening test when it's due.

How is a HPV cervical screening test done?

The screening test usually takes about 5 minutes.

1. You will be asked to undress from the waist down and lie on a couch.
2. You can lie on your side or on your back, whichever is more comfortable for you.
3. The doctor or nurse will gently put an instrument called a speculum into your vagina. This holds the walls of the vagina open, so they can see your cervix.
4. A small soft brush will be used to gently collect a sample of cells from the cervix.

Some people find the procedure uncomfortable or embarrassing, but for most it's not painful. If you find the test painful, tell the doctor or nurse as they may be able to reduce your discomfort. Screening can become more uncomfortable after the menopause. If this is the case for you, please discuss with your doctor, who can advise you on ways to make screening more comfortable.

What happens to my sample?

Your sample will go to a quality-assured laboratory (lab). In the lab your sample will be tested to see if you have a HPV infection. If HPV is found, at least two scientists will examine your sample for cell changes. If they find any changes, the sample is then reviewed by a third expert screener. If the abnormalities are confirmed, you will need a follow-up test called a colposcopy.

A colposcopy is a more detailed look at your cervix. See page 11 for more details.

How will I find out about my test results?

Your results will be sent to you by post, usually within 4 weeks of the test. They will also be sent to your GP (doctor) or clinic.

What do my test results mean?

There are four possible results.

1. HPV not found

Your results show you do not have a HPV infection at this time. You will have your next cervical screening test in 3 or 5 years, depending on your age.

2. HPV found and no abnormal cell changes found

Your results show you have a HPV infection but no abnormal cell changes were seen. You should have a repeat test in 12 months. If the repeat test shows you still have HPV, we will refer you for a follow-up procedure called a colposcopy.

3. HPV found and abnormal cell changes found

Your results show you have a HPV infection and abnormal cell changes in your cervix. You need a follow-up procedure called a colposcopy – a more detailed look at your cervix. It is similar to having cervical screening.
See page 11 for more details.

4. Inadequate sample

This means that the lab could not process your screening test sample. You will be asked to repeat your cervical screening in three months.

When we have your results, we will send them to you with further information about what they mean. You can also find more information on **hse.ie/cervicalcheck**

HPV infection and your partner

You can have HPV for years and not know it. This makes it difficult to tell when you got the infection.

You can have a HPV infection even if you have not been sexually active for some time.

If HPV is found, it does not mean your partner has had sex with someone else.

False negative and false positive results

Sometimes screening test results overestimate or underestimate your risk of cervical cancer.

We call these results ‘false positives’ and ‘false negatives’ respectively.

False positives and false negatives are unavoidable. They happen in every screening programme.

False positive results

A result may be reported as positive even though no abnormality was found in the cervix. A ‘false positive’ may mean you will have further tests that ultimately confirm there was no high-grade abnormal cells on your cervix at that time.

False negative results

A result may be reported as negative even though an abnormality was present in the cervix. A ‘false negative’ may mean that you do not have further tests when there are abnormalities present.

Cervical screening is still one of the best ways to protect against developing cervical cancer. See page 14 for symptoms of cervical cancer.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a detailed examination of the cervix. It is free when you are referred through the CervicalCheck screening programme and is carried out by a doctor or nurse in hospital. It usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes.

If you need a colposcopy, the doctor or nurse who took your screening test will give you more information and refer you to a colposcopy clinic.

HPV vaccine

The free HPV vaccine given to students (boys and girls) in first year of secondary school can protect against some types of HPV. Even if you have had the vaccine, you will still need to have regular HPV cervical screening. This is because the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV. See **hpv.ie** for more information.

Giving your consent

Each time you have a cervical screening test we will ask you to give your consent by signing a cervical screening form before the test. If you cannot sign the form, you will be asked to give your consent either verbally or by making a mark on the form in front of a doctor or nurse.

This is to confirm that you:

- have been told about cervical screening and its benefits and limitations
- understand this information
- have checked that your name, address and other details are correct (this helps us confirm we have your current address to communicate with you)
- allow us to receive, hold and exchange your personal information and screening history with those who deliver the HPV cervical screening programme

Remember: Only you can give your consent to be part of our programme. You have to consent before you have your screening test.

You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting us on Freephone **1800 45 45 55** or emailing **info@cervicalcheck.ie**

This means we will not contact you about the cervical screening programme in the future.

Where did CervicalCheck get your details?

CervicalCheck puts together a list of women who qualify for screening. We get these details from the Department of Social Protection and from people who register for the screening programme themselves over the phone or online. We gather this information under the Health Provision of Information Act, 1997. This Act covers collecting names and addresses of people who need to be invited to take part in screening programmes.

How do we use your personal information?

CervicalCheck takes and securely stores your personal information (name, address, phone number, date of birth, PPSN, surname at birth and mother's maiden name) and cervical screening history. Your cervical screening history relates to your participation in CervicalCheck.

It can include HPV cervical screening results, colposcopy attendances, treatments and biopsy (test sample) results.

We will use your information to contact you when your next screening test is due or when your results are available. We also exchange your information with the other health services that deliver the programme. This includes the doctor or nurse who takes your screening test, the screening laboratories, colposcopy clinics and the National Cancer Registry Ireland. This is to maintain and improve the quality of the service.

We may use your screening test sample in teaching, in reviews and to check the quality and effectiveness of the programme. We may also use your information to invite you to take part in research.

It is your choice to take part in screening or not. We will never use your name in any reports, when teaching or in reviews. We will keep your personal information safe, secure and confidential in line with current data protection regulations.

You will have full and open access to your personal information held by CervicalCheck upon request. It is important that you let CervicalCheck know if your details change. To find out how to access your records, see **hse.ie/gdpr/data-requests**

For further information see the HSE Privacy Notice – Patients and Service Users at **hse.ie/gdpr**

Communicating with you

We will communicate with you in an open, honest, timely and transparent manner if:

- something goes wrong with your care
- you experience harm as a result of your care
- we think that harm may have occurred

This means that we will keep you fully informed of the facts and details about your participation in the cervical screening programme.

How can I reduce my risk of getting cervical cancer?

You can reduce your risk of cervical cancer by:

- having regular screening tests
- talking to your doctor about any concerns or symptoms
- seek support to stop smoking if you do, as smoking can prevent the body's immune system from clearing infections such as HPV

Screening review

If you are diagnosed with cervical cancer after screening you can ask for a review of your screening. Contact review.request@screeningservice.ie or National Screening Service, King's Inns House, 200 Parnell St, Freepost FDN7612, Dublin 1, D01A3Y8.

Symptoms of cervical cancer

Outside of your regular screening tests please be aware of symptoms that might mean you have cervical cancer. Contact your doctor if you have any concerns.

Symptoms to look out for:

- bleeding between periods
- vaginal spotting or unusual discharge
- pain during sex
- bleeding after sex
- a pain in your pelvis (anywhere between your belly button and the top of your thighs)

Feedback and contact information

We welcome your feedback.

Email: info@cervicalcheck.ie

Freephone: 1800 45 45 55

Website: hse.ie/cervicalcheck

Post: CervicalCheck, Freepost LK407, Limerick

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Plain English
Approved by NALA

CS/PUB/CC-1 Rev 15 HSS01408 September 2025