Important information about your HPV cervical screening results

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

CervicalCheck
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME

Important information about your HPV cervical screening results

Your HPV cervical screening test results are usually sent to you in a letter. Your GP (doctor) will get a copy of your results.

You should get your results within 4 weeks of your test. If you have waited longer than 4 weeks, call your GP or clinic to see if they have any updates.

If your results are taking a long time to get to you it does not mean anything is wrong. Most people's results are normal (no HPV found).

What your results letter means

Your letter may say:

1. HPV not found
2. HPV found and no abnormal cell changes found
3. HPV and abnormal cell changes found
4. Inadequate sample

1. HPV not found

You do not have a HPV infection at this time. You will have your next screening test in 3 or 5 years depending on your age. We will write to you when your next screening test is due.

We do not check for abnormal cells when HPV is not found. This is because your risk of developing cell changes is very low.

But screening is not perfect. It has limitations. You still need to attend your next screening test when it's due. You could still get a HPV infection in the future. You may still be at risk of developing cervical cancer in the future. You should also look out for symptoms of cervical cancer in between screening appointments. See page 11 for more information.

2. HPV found and no abnormal cell changes found

Your results show you have a HPV infection but it does not seem to be causing changes to the cells in your cervix.

You should have a repeat test in 12 months.

This will give your body time to clear the HPV infection. Most people's immune system clears HPV from their body within 18 months without any treatment. But in some people the infection stays.

Your repeat test in 12 months will check if the infection has gone.

If it has, you are safe to return to screening every 3 or 5 years, depending on your age.

If the repeat test shows you still have a HPV infection, you will have a follow-up test called a colposcopy. A colposcopy is a more detailed look at your cervix. It is similar to having cervical screening.

Having HPV does not mean you have cervical cancer. In most cases it takes about 10 to 15 years for cervical cancer to develop.

Cervical cancer is a rare outcome of a HPV infection.

3. HPV and abnormal cell changes found

Your results show you have a HPV infection and abnormal cells in your cervix.

You need a follow-up test called a colposcopy. A colposcopy is a more detailed look at your cervix. It is similar to having cervical screening.

Your GP or nurse will have more details about your result. It's very important you follow their advice.

A colposcopy is free when you are referred through the CervicalCheck programme and usually takes 15 to 20 minutes.

It is unlikely you have cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is a rare outcome of a HPV infection.

In most cases it takes about 10 to 15 years for cervical cancer to develop.

4. Inadequate sample

This means that the laboratory (lab) could not process your screening test sample.

You'll need to have a repeat test in about 3 months. You need to wait 3 months so that the cells in your cervix have time to grow back and we can get the best sample.

An inadequate sample result does not mean there is something wrong. Talk to your GP or nurse if you have any questions.

If you receive 3 inadequate results in-a-row, you will be referred for colposcopy – a more detailed look at your cervix.

Types of HPV infection

Cervical screening looks to see if you have any of the high-risk types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

It does not tell us exactly which HPV type or how many HPV types were found.

HPV infection and your partner

HPV can stay dormant (sleeping) in your body for many years before it becomes active. It may never cause any cell changes.

You can have HPV for years and not know it. This makes it difficult to tell when you got the infection. If HPV is found in a screening test, there is no way to tell how long the HPV infection has been there.

You could test negative for HPV – no HPV found – now and then positive – HPV found – a few years later. This can happen even if you have not been sexually active in between.

Having a positive HPV result does not mean your partner has had sex with someone else.

What are the benefits of cervical screening?

Regular HPV cervical screening:

- saves lives
- can find HPV before it causes abnormal cells in the cervix
- can find abnormal cell changes before symptoms of cervical cancer develop
- can find abnormal cell changes when they are easier to treat

Finding HPV and 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.

Since CervicalCheck started in 2008:

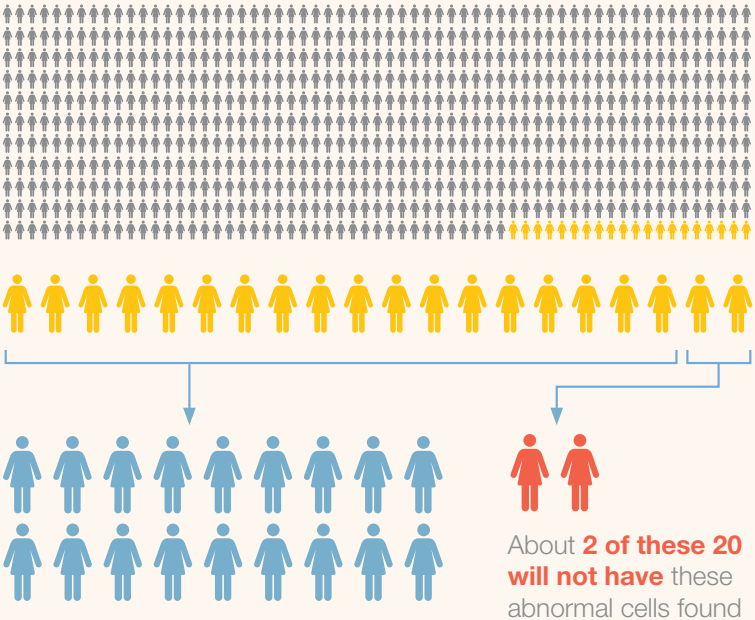
- more than 3 million screening tests have been carried out
- the number of people who develop cervical cancer has fallen
- over 100,000 cases of abnormal cervical cells have been detected, many of which could have developed into cancer if not detected through screening and treated where necessary

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 fnd every abnormal cell change
- sometimes test results are not accurate, see section about ‘Inaccurate results’ on page 9

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.

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

A negative HPV test – where no HPV is found – also does not mean you won't get the infection in the future.

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.

Cervical cancer takes many years to develop. In most cases, it takes 10 to 15 years for cells to go from normal to abnormal to cancer.

If your sample was positive for HPV, you will have a repeat test in 12 months.

This means that if abnormal cells were missed on one screening test, they should be found quickly on the next test.

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

Inaccurate results

Sometimes test results are inaccurate. As a consequence, you may have further tests at colposcopy that you do not need.

Or you may be told that you do not need further tests or treatment, when there is actually a risk of cancer at the time.

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 risk of cancer 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 may have been a risk of cancer at the time you were screened.

False positives and false negatives may cause you to lose trust in the screening programme. But the benefits of cervical screening outweigh these limitations.

Cervical screening is still one of the best ways to protect against developing cervical cancer.

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 laboratory, 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 audits 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.

Screening review

If you are diagnosed with cervical cancer after screening you can ask for a review. 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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