

## Now it's time to look after yourself...

### What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening involves testing women aged 25 to 60 for changes in the cells of the cervix (the neck of the womb).



### What is a cervical smear test?

A cervical smear (also known as a pap test) is a simple procedure where a doctor or nurse takes a sample of cells to look for early changes in the cells of the cervix (the neck of the womb). If these are not found and treated, they could become cancer cells.

Sometimes cells in the cervix can change due to an infection caused by certain types of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV is a common viral infection usually spread by sexual contact and most adults will have it at some time in their lives. HPV infections have no symptoms and are normally cleared by a person's immune system. However, if a woman has a type of HPV infection that is linked to abnormal changes to cervical cells, and does not clear the infection on her own, she is at greater risk of developing cervical cancer.

A smear test can detect cell changes to the cervix and the cells can then be treated. The earlier abnormal cell changes are found, the easier they are to treat.

As with all screening tests, cervical screening may not always be 100% accurate. There is a small risk that abnormal cells will not be picked up in a cervical smear test. However, any abnormal cells will usually be picked up on future smears. This is why it is important to have regular smear tests.

### Who should have a cervical smear test?

Every woman aged between 25 and 60 should have regular smear tests whether married or single, heterosexual or lesbian. You need to continue with regular smear tests after the menopause.

### Why should women have this test?

Quite simply, regular cervical smear tests could save your life. A smear test detects early changes in the neck of the womb. The earlier a change is found, the easier it is to treat.



### When is the best time for me to have a cervical smear test?

The best time to attend for your cervical smear test is mid-cycle, that is, 10 to 14 days after the first day of your period (if you are having periods).

### How is a cervical smear test done?

The smear test is a very simple procedure taking less than five minutes. It may be slightly uncomfortable but should not be painful. You may lie on your side or on your back for the smear.



The doctor or nurse will gently insert an instrument called a speculum into your vagina to hold it open. The cervix is the area where the uterus (womb) opens into the top of the vagina. The doctor or nurse will use a small spatula or tiny special broom to gently remove a sample of cells from the cervix. This sample is sent to the laboratory to be checked.



### What if I've had a hysterectomy?

If you have had a hysterectomy (your womb removed) you should check with your doctor if you need to continue with cervical screening.



### Can I choose who takes the cervical smear test?

You can have a cervical smear test done by a doctor or a nurse. You can decide which person you would prefer to take the smear.

### What happens after I have my test?

The person who took your smear test will let you know if you need any treatment or if the smear test needs to be repeated.

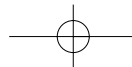
### How often will I be offered the test?

If the result from your first smear is normal, you should have further smear tests every three years between the ages of 25 and 44 and every five years between the ages of 45 and 60.

If the result from your first smear is not normal, you may need to have a repeat smear or more specialised tests. The person who took your smear will tell you when your next test is due.

If you have any unusual or irregular vaginal bleeding, spotting or discharge, do not wait for your smear test. Contact your doctor immediately.

**Most smear tests are normal. Even a result that is not normal is unlikely to mean you have cancer. It may be due to an infection or minor cell changes.**



### How do I get my result?

Your results and details on whether you need to follow them up will be available from the person who took your smear test.

### I'm afraid of what the result might mean...

Most smear tests are normal. Even a result that is not normal is unlikely to mean you have cancer. It may be due to an infection or minor cell changes.

The earlier a change is found, the easier it is to treat. Do not be alarmed if you are called back for another test.

### What if my smear test is not normal?

You may need to have a repeat smear or a more detailed examination of the cervix using a type of microscope. This test is called a colposcopy. If there are abnormal cells on your cervix, they can be easily treated to prevent them later developing into cancer cells.



### What are the symptoms of cancer of the cervix?

- Abnormal bleeding
  - after intercourse
  - between periods
  - after the menopause
- Abnormal vaginal discharge.

It is important to realise, however, that you may not have any warning symptoms. In this case, abnormal cells may be detected by examining cells from the cervix.

### How can I reduce my risk of getting cervical cancer?

- Have regular smear tests to pick up any early problems
- Stop smoking
- Visit your doctor if you have symptoms such as irregular vaginal bleeding, bleeding after intercourse, bleeding following the menopause, unusual vaginal discharge.

### Doctor's contact details



## Cervical screening saves lives



You can get more information on [www.icsp.ie](http://www.icsp.ie)

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# About your smear test

Cervical screening saves lives



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