

yes

Cervical Screening

Smear Test Information

All you need to know!

Working Together



Why are smear tests important?

- Human papilloma virus (HPV) is a common infection – most sexually active people come into contact with HPV during their lifetime – for most people virus causes no harm and infection clear on its own, however, high-risk HPV can lead to cell changes (abnormal cells) – that can progress into cervical cancer. The types of HPV that cause cervical cancer do not cause any symptoms.
- This is a **slow** process, can take between 5-20 years to develop into cancer so the earlier it is detected, the better.
- The screening test helps to prevent cervical cancer by picking up on changes in the cervix which could increase the risk of cervical cancer and offering further tests to those who need them. It is during this time of further tests that any changes in cells, which could develop into cancer if left untreated, can be removed. It is important to note that **smear testing is not the test used to diagnose cancer.**

How is HPV transmitted?

- Skin-to-skin contact in the genital areas – includes vaginal, anal, oral sex, any touching in the genital area, shared use of sex toys.
- Can be passed on even if a condom is used because only partially covers the genital area.

What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

If you have any symptoms you are concerned about such as a change in vaginal discharge, change in bleeding pattern or pain, see your GP, don't wait for your cervical smear test.

- Increased/ irregular vaginal discharge
- Pelvic/ back pain – any pain between the hips that you're concerned about
- Pain and/or bleeding during penetrative sex
- Irregular bleeding/ spotting
- Bleeding after menopause

Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives each year in the UK and prevents 8 out of 10 cancers from developing.



99.8%
of cases of
cervical cancer
are caused by
HPV

What happens during a smear test?

- Your appointment will usually last 10 minutes and the smear test itself generally takes a couple of minutes. If you feel nervous about having your smear test done, you can have someone accompany you for support (either a nurse, family member, or friend).
- You will be asked to go behind a curtain, take off the lower half of your clothing in private and be given something to cover yourself with.
- A speculum, a plastic device (different sizes available), is used to gently hold open your vagina while a nurse takes a look at your cervix (at top of vagina) and takes a sample of your cervix cells with a soft plastic brush.
- Little brush turned 5 full circles to collect cells.
- Screening takes place every 3yrs for women between 25-49yrs and every 5yrs for women between 50-64yrs, unless results are abnormal, in which case you do not need to worry, this just means we'll need to pay some extra attention!



Test only
takes around
2 mins



Take a
deeeeeeeep
breath and remember,
you have the right
to say 'STOP' at any
point throughout the
procedure - you are
in control!

A sample is
taken with a
soft plastic
brush



Worries...

"I am clinically vulnerable and/or worried about catching coronavirus"

During the pandemic, many doctors' surgeries and healthcare centres continue to operate with safe practice. Staff will be wearing appropriate PPE (masks, gloves, aprons) and patients are asked to wear a face covering (unless exempted). Other precautions may be put in place such as taking everyone's temperature on entry into the building, reduced in-person appointments, regular cleaning, and appropriate social distancing between seats in the waiting rooms. If you are concerned about the safety of attending your smear test appointment, please contact your GP directly to find out what their current procedures are.

Try and book your smear test for when you're not on your period

Avoid using vaginal medications/ lubrications/creams and having sex for 2 days before your test as there's a chance that these can affect results

"Scared it will hurt"

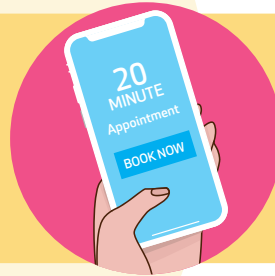
We understand your concern and would like to assure you that the procedure can cause minor discomfort, but should not be painful. If it does hurt, remember you are in control and can ask the nurse to stop at any point. You can also speak to the nurse about any concerns you might have and they might be able to suggest some things to make you feel more comfortable, such as breathing exercises, listening to music, and wiggling your toes.

"I'm worried about what the test might find"

This is not a test for cancer. The aim is to find and treat abnormal cell changes before they get a chance to turn into cancer. You are at more risk not knowing your status, and if anything is detected, the sooner we know the better we can act.

What can be done to make you feel more comfortable?

A double appointment (20 minutes) is usually booked for smear tests, however, you can check this with your GP when you make your appointment if you would like some extra time.



A female nurse usually carries out smear tests, however you can check with your GP when booking an appointment. In the case that your practice does not have a female nurse, you can usually be booked into a nearby medical centre to have your smear test done.

Bring along a chaperone with you or ask for a chaperone at your health centre if you would like some support. If you are struggling with childcare, you can ask your GP if children can be brought along too.



Ask a nurse for a different size speculum if you are finding the use of the selected speculum very uncomfortable.

Worries...



"I think I'm low risk because I'm not currently sexually active or I am in a same sex (lesbian) relationship"

When we talk about being sexually active this is not just limited to penetrative sex- it can include oral sex, touching the genital area and sharing sex toys. As mentioned, screening is offered to everyone who has a cervix, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. It is also important to remember that cell changes in the cervix can take years to develop and so it's important to get tested regularly if you have ever been sexually active, even if you are not currently.

"I've never been sexually active, can I still have a smear test?"

If you've not been sexually active in any of the ways mentioned (penetrative, oral sex, touching genital areas, sharing sex toys), you can still have a smear test, you are just at a much lower risk of HPV.

"People will think I've slept around"

This is a test to prevent cancer. It does not mean anyone has slept with lots of people. It is offered without judgement to all women and people with a cervix from the ages of 24.5 - 64. It is also confidential, which means no one but you will find out about your results.



Ask for more help! If you've found this information leaflet useful and would like some more support or advice on smear tests or other sexual health issues, get in touch with us, we're here to help!

Call email or message via social media

020 7851 2955

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