



Cervical Screening: Pre-Appointment Patient Information leaflet

Why Should You Have Cervical Screening?

Cervical screening helps prevent cervical cancer. It saves thousands of lives from cervical cancer each year in the UK. In England cervical screening currently prevents 70% of cervical cancer deaths. If everyone attended screening regularly, 83% could be prevented.

Who Should Have Screening?

Cervical screening is for women and people with a cervix. The NHS offers screening every 3 years from age 25 to 49 and every 5 years from age 50 to 64, this is because most cervical cancers occur in women between these ages, some people are screened more often due to a previous screening result.

At Time to Pause we are happy to screen women >25 years annually. We would not recommend that women <25 are screened as rates of cervical cancer are low in this age group and it is common to pick up minor abnormalities that clear up on their own, women <25 years who have symptoms they are concerned about should see a doctor and be examined.

You should consider having screening regardless of your sexual orientation, sexual history, or whether you have had the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination.

Having a cervical screen privately will not affect your eligibility for your next NHS screening test when it is due.

Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer happens when cells in the cervix grow in an uncontrolled way and build up to form a lump (also called a tumour). As the tumour grows, cells can eventually spread to other parts of the body and become life-threatening.

Your cervix is the neck of your womb, it is the lowest part of the womb, and it is found at the top of your vagina.



HPV and Cervical Cancer

Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV).

HPV is very common. Most people will get the virus at some point in their life. It is spread through close skin to skin contact during any type of sexual activity with a man or woman. HPV can stay in the body for many years. It can stay at very low or undetectable levels and not cause any problems. This means an HPV infection may have come from a partner a long time ago.

There are many different types of HPV, but only some high-risk types can lead to cancer. The types of HPV that cause cervical cancer do not cause any symptoms. In most cases, your immune system can get rid of the virus without you ever knowing you had it. But sometimes, HPV can cause cells in your cervix to become abnormal.

Your body can usually get rid of the abnormal cells and your cervix returns to normal. But sometimes this doesn't happen, and the abnormal cells can go on to develop into cancer.

What Affects Your Chances of Getting Cervical Cancer

Having cervical screening lowers your chances of getting cervical cancer. Screening finds abnormal cells so they can be removed before they become cancer.

HPV is found on the skin around the whole genital area and can be spread through any type of sexual activity. This means that condoms can help prevent infection, but they don't provide total protection from HPV.

Smoking increases the risk of cervical cancer because it makes it harder for your body to get rid of HPV infections. Information about stopping smoking is available on the NHS smokefree website.

The HPV vaccination protects against the types of high-risk HPV that cause most cervical cancers. If you have had the HPV vaccination you will still need to consider having cervical screening when you are invited. This is to check for other high-risk HPV types that can lead to cervical cancer.

Having a family history of cervical cancer does not affect your chances of developing cervical cancer.



Before Your Appointment

Cervical screening at Time to Pause is carried out by a female doctor. Please let us know if you would like a chaperone to be present.

Your appointment should be on a day when you are not having a period. If you don't have periods, you can be screened at any time.

Please don't use any vaginal medications, lubricants or creams in the 2 days before you have your test because they can affect the results.

If a cervical screen has ever been uncomfortable or you suffer with vulvovaginal discomfort or discomfort with sexual intimacy, if you have already been prescribed a vaginal oestrogen please use this every day for two weeks before the procedure, if not please talk to us BEFORE you procedure so we can decide whether it would be helpful.

Please also talk to us before your appointment if you are pregnant, have had a hysterectomy, think it would be difficult for you to have the test or if you are nervous about screening.

We are always happy to talk through any questions or concerns you have and can make arrangements to help you feel more comfortable.

At Your Appointment

The actual test only takes a few minutes, but you will have a 20 minute appointment so that you do not feel rushed, have plenty of time for questions before and time to recover afterwards. Sanitary products are not normally needed but we will provide them should you need them.

The treatment room at Holly Grange is calm and peaceful, it is completely private with a comfortable couch, a screen to get changed and paper roll to use as a modesty cover. It is maintained at a comfortable temperature and the door is lockable to avoid any disruption. A chaperone will always be available for all or part of the examination at your request.

The nurse or doctor will ask you to undress from your waist down (or just remove your underwear if you are wearing a loose skirt) and lie on a bed with your knees bent and apart. You will have a paper sheet or towel to cover your stomach and hips.

They will put a device called a speculum into your vagina and open it gently. This allows them to see your cervix. The speculum is made of plastic and a new one is used for each screening test. The nurse or doctor then uses a small soft brush to take a sample of cells from the surface of your cervix. You might feel some discomfort, but this should go away quickly. If it feels painful, tell the nurse or doctor and they will try to make it more comfortable for you.

You are in control of your screening appointment, and you can ask to stop at any time.



Cervical screening results

You will receive your results over secure email within 2 weeks, if you have not heard within this time, please check your spam folder and contact the clinic by emailing: info@timetopause.co.uk.

There are 4 possible results.

1. HPV negative

An HPV negative result means we will not do any further tests. This result means it is highly unlikely that you will have any abnormal cervical cells. Even if you did, it would be extremely unlikely that they would cause a problem. You should be rescreened in 3- or 5-years' time (depending on your age).

2. HPV positive: no abnormal cells

If your sample is HPV positive, we also test it for abnormal cervical cells. If none are found, your result will say you have HPV, but no abnormal cells. You should have your cervical screen repeated in 12 months either privately or on the NHS at your GP surgery. This is so we can check if your immune system has got rid of the HPV (this happens in most cases).

3. HPV positive: abnormal cells found

There are several 'grades' of abnormal cells as some are more serious than others. Your result letter will explain what your results mean. If you have HPV and any grade of abnormal cervical cells we will refer you for colposcopy, this can be done privately, or we can ask your GP to refer you on the NHS.

4. Inadequate result

Occasionally a sample may be called 'inadequate'. This may be due to a technical problem, for example, if the laboratory cannot get an HPV test result from your sample or cannot see if abnormal cells are present or not. If you have an inadequate test, we will ask you to have cervical screening again in 3 months' time. We wait so that there are enough cells again to get a sample from.

For every 100 people having cervical screening:

- 87 will have an HPV negative result.
- 13 will have an HPV positive result, of which:
 - 9 will have no abnormal cells and will be advised are to be screened again in 12 months.
 - 4 will have abnormal cells and be referred to colposcopy.



Colposcopy

Colposcopy is usually carried out in a hospital clinic. A specialist will take a close look at your cervix using a magnifying lens with a light (a 'colposcope'). They may take a small tissue sample (a biopsy) to check any areas of your cervix which look unusual. If the abnormal cells are serious, you may need treatment to remove them. This helps prevent cervical cancer. Please follow this [link](#) for more information on colposcopy.

No screening test is 100% effective.

In cervical screening this is because:

An HPV infection or abnormal cells can sometimes be missed (a 'false negative' result)

Abnormal cells can develop and turn into cancer in between screening tests

There is a small chance that a result says abnormal cells are found when the cervix is normal (a 'false positive' result)

If screening does not find abnormal cells this does not guarantee that you do not have them, or that they will never develop in the future, so it is very important to report any symptoms of bleeding between your periods, during or after sex, or after the menopause or changes to vaginal discharge to a doctor straight away. Usually, these symptoms will not mean you have cancer. But if you are found to have cancer, getting it diagnosed and treated early can mean you are more likely to survive.