

The facts: cervical screening

Jo's cervical
cancer trust



What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening (a smear test) is a free health test available on the NHS as part of the national cervical screening programme. It helps prevent cervical cancer by checking for a virus called high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cell changes. It is not a test for cancer.

Who is invited for cervical screening?

In the UK, you are automatically invited for cervical screening if you are:

- between the ages of 25 to 64
- registered as female with a GP surgery.

You may get your first invite up to 6 months before you turn 25. You can book an appointment as soon as you get the invite.

How often will I be invited for cervical screening?

Your cervical screening result will help decide when you are next invited for cervical screening.

You may be invited:

- every year
- every 3 years
- every 5 years
- straight to colposcopy for more tests.

Helpful tips for cervical screening

- Ask to book a longer appointment if you think you may need more time during or after your test.
- Take someone you trust with you, to wait with you or be in the room during the appointment.
- Tell your nurse if you are anxious or if there is anything that makes the test difficult for you.
- If you feel comfortable, wearing a skirt or dress may help you feel more covered.
- Ask for a smaller speculum if you find the standard size too uncomfortable.

Read more tips at jostrust.org.uk/smeartest

What happens at the appointment?

Your nurse gives you a private space to undress from the waist down and asks you to lie on a bed.

They will gently place a clean speculum into your vagina. A speculum is a hollow cylinder with a rounded edge, usually made of plastic or metal. It opens so your nurse can see your cervix.

Your nurse will then use a small, soft brush to gather cells from your cervix.

That's it! Your sample of cells will be sent for testing. You should get your results by post within 2 weeks.

More information and support

We have lots more information and support on HPV, cervical screening, cell changes (abnormal cells) and cervical cancer, including:

- our website with information reviewed by experts at jostrust.org.uk/information
- a wide range of information resources at jostrust.org.uk/shop
- our Ask The Expert service at jostrust.org.uk/ask-expert
- an online Forum at jostrust.org.uk/forum
- a dedicated Helpline on **0808 802 8000** – check the opening hours at jostrust.org.uk/helpline

Thanks and references

Thank you to everyone shared their experiences to help us develop this information. All of our information is reviewed by experts for clinical accuracy – thanks to those who reviewed this.

For references, email info@jostrust.org.uk

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