

let's talk

Cervical screening awareness
in multicultural communities



Cancer Institute NSW

To find out more about cervical screening go to: www.cancer.nsw.gov.au/cervical-screening-nsw



Cancer Institute NSW



metro assist

Let's talk about HPV and Cervical Screening:

What is a Cervical Screening Test?

The Cervical Screening Test is a test for human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer. If HPV is found, then the test also looks for any cell changes in the cervix that could eventually lead to cervical cancer, so that they can be monitored or treated.

The Cervical Screening Test is recommended every five years for women aged 25 to 74 who have ever been sexually active. The test can be provided by doctors, nurses and specialists such as gynecologists.

I've already had a Pap test. Do I still need to do a Cervical Screening Test?

Yes - the Cervical Screening Test has replaced the Pap test. It is a more accurate test as it detects HPV whereas the Pap test only looked for cell changes in the cervix. If you have been having Pap tests is recommended you do your first Cervical Screening Test two years after your most recent Pap test. If your Cervical Screening Test is normal you will only need to have the test every five years.

If you have not been having Pap tests in the past then you should have your first Cervical Screening Test when you turn 25 years of age. If you are over 25, have your first Cervical Screening Test as soon as possible.

I have had the HPV vaccine. Do I still need to have regular Cervical Screening Tests?

Yes - the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV known to cause cervical cancer. For this reason, all women vaccinated or unvaccinated should have a Cervical Screening Test every five years.

Frequently Asked Questions



I am 18 years old and I have never had the HPV vaccine. When should I get the Cervical Screening Test?

You should go for your first Cervical Screening Test when you turn 25 years of age. If you have any symptoms, concerns or questions, you should speak to your GP.

Is it true that I can prevent HPV infection by using barrier contraception?

No - condoms and other barrier contraception may only provide some protection from HPV, but they do not cover all the genital skin and so do not protect against all HPV infection. Regular cervical screening can detect a HPV infection early so that it can be monitored. If HPV is found, the Cervical Screening Test also looks for any cell changes in the cervix that could eventually develop into cervical cancer.

I use clean undergarments, always clean the toilet seat cover, maintain my health and practice good hygiene. Can I still be infected by HPV?

Yes. HPV is not spread through dirty clothes or toilet seats. HPV is transferred through genital skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. The virus is very common and usually gets cleared by the body's immune system within one to two years without causing any problems.

I have only ever had one partner. Can I still be infected by HPV?

Yes - HPV is very common and you can still be infected by HPV if you have only ever had one partner.

I am not currently sexually active. Do I still need to have a Cervical Screening Test?

Yes. If you have ever been sexually active – even just once, with males or females – you should do the Cervical Screening Test to check for HPV. This is because it can take 10 to 15 years or longer for HPV to cause cell changes that may develop into cervical cancer. There are often no symptoms in the early stages.

Frequently Asked Questions



I am healthy, and don't have any symptoms. Do I still need to do the Cervical Screening Test?

Yes. HPV does not usually cause any symptoms. The purpose of the Cervical Screening Test is to prevent cervical cancer through early detection of HPV and any abnormal cell changes, so you need it even if you are healthy. Regular screening is very important and effective in detecting a HPV infection and any cell changes in the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer.

If you are experiencing any symptoms, such as unusual bleeding, persistent unusual vaginal discharge or pelvic pain, see your doctor straight away and do not wait for your Cervical Screening Test.

I am afraid the test will be painful. Is this true?

The Cervical Screening Test looks and feels similar to having a Pap test. While it can be uncomfortable, most people do not find it to be painful. You can let your doctor or nurse know if you feel any pain during the test.

No one in my family has ever had cervical cancer. Does this mean I have no chance of getting cervical cancer?

There is no evidence that cervical cancer is inherited. HPV infection and not participating in regular cervical screening are the main risk factors for developing cervical cancer.

Is it possible for me to do a self-test, like the self-test kits for bowel cancer?

Yes – it is possible to do a self-collected sample for cervical screening, but there are certain eligibility criteria and it must be done at a doctor's clinic (not at home). For more information, talk to your GP or nurse.

My GP is a Male. Can I ask for a female GP to do my Cervical Screening Test?

Yes – if you don't feel comfortable with a certain doctor, you can always ask to see someone else or go to another clinic. A female GP can also be available to conduct the screening if women prefer. Remember to make an appointment - this will increase the likelihood of seeing the doctor of your choice.