

# HPV Self-Screening for Cervical Screening

A plain English guide for  
women and people with  
a cervix aged 25 to 64



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## Key points

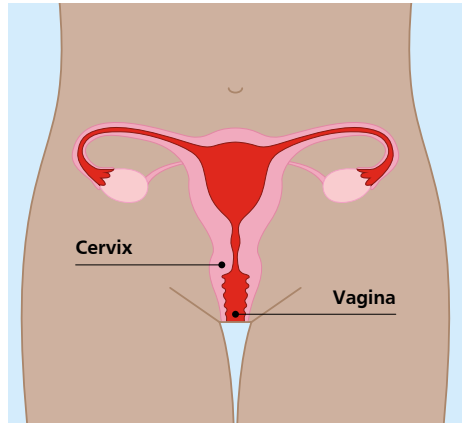
- Almost all cervical cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).
- The HPV self-screening test takes a swab from the vagina to test for human papillomavirus (HPV).
- HPV self-screening is a test for cervical screening.
- It is offered to women and people with a cervix who rarely attend or who have never attended cervical screening.
- You can take your own sample for cervical screening at your GP practice.
- Most women and people with a cervix will not have HPV. However, if we find HPV in your sample, you will need to have another sample collected by a doctor or nurse. This is to check for abnormal cervical cells. Abnormal cells can develop into cervical cancer if left untreated.

# HPV self-screening for cervical screening

## What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening looks for HPV in the cervix. For a very small number of women and people with a cervix, HPV can be serious and cause cervical cancer. This is a cancer that starts in the cervix. It is a very serious illness that you can die from.

Having the test can stop you getting cervical cancer. Having cervical screening saves thousands of lives every year.



## What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus. Most people will have it at some point in their life. Your immune system can normally get rid of the virus without you ever knowing you had it. But sometimes HPV can cause cells in your cervix to become abnormal. Usually, your body can get rid of the abnormal cells and your cervix returns to normal. But if this doesn't happen, the abnormal cells can go on to develop into cancer. You can find more information about HPV and cervical screening here:

[gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-description-in-brief](https://gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-description-in-brief)

## What is the HPV self-screening test?

The HPV self-screening test allows you to take your own sample from the vagina using a swab (like a long cotton bud). It is free and easy to use.

Most women and people with a cervix find it comfortable and pain free.

## Who is offered HPV self-screening test?

HPV self-screening is offered to people who have never, or do not, attend cervical screening regularly.

If you are eligible to access this test, your nurse or doctor will notify you when you attend the practice for any reason.

# Doing the test yourself

You do not need to worry about whether you will take a good quality sample. Research shows that 99 out of 100 women are able to do self-screening properly.

Your kit will include an easy-to-follow instructional leaflet and a step-by-step online animation for added support.

When you have completed your sample, your GP practice will send it to the laboratory, who will test it for human papillomavirus (HPV).

**Research shows that 99 out of 100 women are able to do self-screening properly.**

## Is a self-screen as good as a sample taken by a doctor or a nurse?

A sample taken by a doctor or nurse is most effective. However, a self-screen is a very good option if you do not wish to have your cervical screening sample taken by a doctor or nurse. Self-screening is already being offered routinely in other countries.

## I am not a doctor or nurse – can I take a self-screen properly?

Self-screening is different to traditional cervical screening tests. The swab does not need to reach far inside your vagina. HPV is a virus so it will be present in the whole area inside your vagina.

### **Please do not use HPV self-screening if:**

- you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant. We advise that you wait 12 weeks after the baby is born to have cervical screening.
- During menstruation (your period)
- you have used vaginal ovules, creams or washes, vaginal contraceptives or condoms in the previous 3 days
- you have had sexual intercourse or gynaecological examinations in the previous 2 days
- you have unusual vaginal bleeding or pelvic pain

If you have any questions, speak to your GP or nurse.

# Your test results

## How will I get my HPV self-screening test results?

After you have completed your HPV self-screening test, your GP will send it to the laboratory. The results will be sent to you within 14 days. Your GP will also receive a copy.

## HPV self-screening test results

There are 3 possible results from the HPV self-screening test:

### 1. No HPV found (HPV negative)

Most women and people with a cervix will test negative for HPV. If no HPV is found, you will not need to do anything further. You will be up to date with your cervical screening. The NHS Cervical Screening Programme will invite you for your next screening in 5 years time.

### 2. HPV found (HPV positive)

If we find HPV in your sample, we will recommend that you book an appointment for a follow-up cervical screening test with a doctor or nurse. If you do not attend, your GP or the NHS Cervical Screening Programme may contact you with further invitations.

### 3. Unavailable result

If your result is inadequate or unavailable, we will ask you to repeat the test. You will be asked to perform another self-screening kit or have a healthcare-professional completed sample.

A test may be inadequate or unavailable because:

- the lab could not get an HPV test result from your sample
- there is missing information on either the sample tube or the lab consent form
- the sample did not arrive at the lab in time

# Your choice

## If I don't want to self-screen, how else can I have cervical screening?

You can book a cervical screening appointment at your GP practice. The test will be taken by a doctor or nurse. Your local sexual health clinic may also offer cervical screening. If you have any concerns about cervical screening you can speak to your GP or practice nurse. If you do decide to have cervical screening at your GP practice, remember you can ask for a female doctor or nurse to take your sample. You are in control of your screening appointment and can ask to stop at any time.

## What are the possible benefits of HPV self-screening for cervical screening?

Some women and people with a cervix find it difficult to make an appointment for cervical screening because they are busy or their GP practice is busy. Some may find it uncomfortable or embarrassing to have a test taken by a doctor or nurse. HPV self-screening allows you to do the test for cervical screening yourself.

Evidence has shown, some women and people with a cervix who had not been for routine cervical screening and took a self-screen were found to have abnormal cervical cells and were successfully treated.

## What are the risks of self-screening kits for cervical screening?

There is a very small chance that the swab could break while you are taking your sample. However, this is very unlikely unless you apply excessive force to the swab. No one has reported this happening in any of the previous studies. In the unlikely event that the swab does break, gently remove it and speak with your healthcare professional.

Women and people with a cervix who have taken self-screens in previous studies have not reported any problems. They found the test easy and convenient to do.

It is important that you understand the possible risks and benefits of cervical screening. You can find further information here:

[gov.uk/government/collections/cervical-screening-information-leaflets](https://gov.uk/government/collections/cervical-screening-information-leaflets)

# Changes to look out for

No screening test is 100% effective. An HPV infection can sometimes be missed (a 'false negative result').

It is important to see your GP immediately if you have any symptoms that are unusual for you, especially bleeding between periods, after sex or after the menopause, or changes to vaginal discharge.

## **You should go to your doctor if you notice any of the following changes at any time.**

- Bleeding from your vagina that is unusual for you, including when it is not your period.
- Bleeding after your periods have completely stopped (after menopause).
- Pain or bleeding during or after having sex.
- Any unusual fluids from your vagina.
- Pain in your lower back, between your hip bones (pelvis) or in your lower tummy.

## **If you need more information**

- You can speak to your doctor or nurse.
- You can talk to your family or carer.
- You can visit the NHS.UK website:

**[nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/cervical-screening](https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/cervical-screening)**