Dear Colleague

Changes to the Cervical Screening Programme Pathway and associated Laboratory Service Provision

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme is changing to HPV primary screening, which will be introduced fully across England by the end of December 2019. The new test, which is more sensitive, will identify more people at risk of cancer and could prevent around 600 cancers a year.

I am delighted to advise that the North Bristol Trust (NBT) has been awarded the contract to provide cervical screening laboratory services across the whole of NHS South West region, replacing the laboratory service your practice currently sends samples. The new service will be located at the NBT laboratory at Southmead Hospital Bristol. This change only affects laboratory services for the cervical screening programme – no other pathology services will change.

In Devon, Cornwall, Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Gloucestershire existing cervical screening laboratories are already using the new test and sample takers are already working to some of the new arrangements.

The full change to the new provider will be phased through the autumn and complete by December 2019.

During this transitional period, existing cervical screening laboratory staff are working hard to continue to provide high quality screening for women. However, we are aware that the changes are resulting in delays in some women receiving their results of their cervical screen. Our priority is to reduce this backlog as quickly as possible, ensuring that all samples are reported on within the 14-day standard.

What does this change mean for GP practices?

- Practices will continue to offer and perform cervical screening to patients in the normal way. Once the new test has been introduced in your area, sample takers will need to inform women attending for screening that the testing pathway has changed.
- All sample takers in your practice must undertake on-line training in HPV primary screening, which takes about 30 minutes. Please aim to have all your staff trained by early October. The training can be accessed on the E-learning for Health site at the following address: https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/
- Results will be sent to each patient and cc’d to your practice by the new laboratory in the usual way
- Ensure sample takers and other practice staff who receive enquiries about cervical
screening are aware of the current extended laboratory processing times and encourage them to use the message for the public at appendix 1. Sample takers should proactively inform women at the time of screening that they may wait longer for results.

- Please respond promptly to queries and requests for information from us, your current laboratory and/or the new laboratory which is needed for the transition.
- Some practices may be affected by changes to the way tests are requested, and also the way results are received. NBT will be in contact soon with details.

**Why is this change happening?**

In July 2016, the National Screening Committee recommended that the NHS Cervical Screening Programme should replace the Cytological Screening Test with the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) primary screening test where samples will first be tested for hrHPV and if found the sample will be screened for abnormal cells. This recommendation was accepted by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Long-Term Plan states that NHS England and NHS Improvement will implement HPV primary screening for cervical cancer across England by 2020.

A national procurement has now secured providers of laboratory services to deliver the service over the whole of England. The provider for the South West is North Bristol Trust and the Regional Public Health Commissioning team is now working with the successful bidder to get the new service in place by December 2019.

If you have any questions about the change to the cervical screening programme, please contact

[phcontractssouthwest@nhs.net](mailto:phcontractssouthwest@nhs.net)

Yours sincerely,

James Bolt
Head of Public Health Commissioning
NHS England and NHS Improvement - South West
Appendix A – advice sample takers can give to women

Letters advising of screening results are usually issued within 14 days of the original sample-taking appointment. However, people are experiencing longer waits due to ongoing changes within the programme. While the level of delay is unlikely to cause or increase the risk of clinical harm, we need to ensure that we manage expectations so as not to cause unnecessary worry.

Key messages for sample takers:

- NHS England and NHS Improvement has committed to the full implementation of HPV Primary Screening across England by December 2019. The new test will identify more people at risk of cancer. Whilst these changes are happening there may be a delay in receiving cervical screening results. It is expected these delays will continue until HPV Primary Screening is fully implemented.

- Please ensure that people are advised at the time of their cervical screening appointment that there may be a delay in receiving results. Please remind people that any delay in receiving their result is unlikely to cause or increase the risk of clinical harm to them. It will also have no implications for any subsequent treatment that is required.

- Whilst it is very unlikely that the level of delay will cause or increase the risk of clinical harm, please advise people that if they experience significant delays and are worried, to contact their GP practice or the clinic where their sample was taken. Sample takers may contact Primary Care Services England on behalf of patients for any queries relating to screening results, using the following link https://pcse.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/.

- Between now and December people should be advised (at the time of their cervical screening appointment) that their sample may be screened for either abnormal cells (using liquid based cytology) or HPV. Both tests are effective screening methods and will not affect the validity of their results. By January 2020, HPV primary screening will be carried out across England as part of the Cervical Screening Programme.