

What is a cervical smear test?

NHS

Hillingdon
Clinical Commissioning Group



A cervical smear is a quick intimate test to detect abnormalities that can be treated to prevent cancer developing.

Every woman (aged 25-64 years) is invited to have a cervical smear test every 3 – 5 years.

Cervical cancer is the most common cancer in women under 35

Cervical smear tests save 5000 women in the UK from developing cancer each year



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The truth about cervical cancer and cervical smear tests

MYTH

FACT

A male nurse or doctor will administer the cervical smear test



The cervical smear test is usually carried out by a female nurse or doctor. If you are unsure, you can check and request to have a female

Only women who are sexually active get cervical cancer



Anyone can be diagnosed with cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is caused by a common virus called Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Around 80% of us will have HPV at some point in our lives, but our immune system usually gets rid of it

I have had only one sexual partner or I am single, so I don't have to do the cervical smear test



Anyone can be diagnosed with cervical cancer. It does not matter how many partners you have had or if you are single

The cervical smear test is painful and embarrassing



A cervical smear is a very quick test. It is generally painless – some women may feel a little discomfort but this goes away quickly. If you have any questions you can speak to your GP or practice nurse in confidence

I don't have any symptoms so I don't need to have the cervical smear test



The cervical smear test is meant for women with no symptoms at all. If you do have the following symptoms, you should speak to your GP:

- Irregular bleeding between periods, after sex, or after the menopause.
- Unusual vaginal discharge
- Pain or discomfort during or after sex

There are not enough appointments available that suits me



GP practices try to work with you to make an appointment for a cervical smear test at a convenient time for you

A cervical smear can only be taken at a certain time in your monthly cycle



A cervical smear can now be performed at any time, however it is best to avoid having your test during your period (menstruation)

If you are pregnant, you cannot have a smear test



If you are already pregnant and are up to date and due for a cervical screening test, the test will usually be postponed until 3 months after your baby is born. However if a woman has missed any of her smear appointments, then your doctor may take the opportunity to perform a smear test whilst you pregnant

I have had my HPV vaccination and so I will not need cervical screening



Women who have been HPV vaccinated will still be invited for cervical screening. It is very important that you attend your screening appointment as HPV vaccines do not protect against all HPV types that can cause cervical cancer