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### Want to know more?

Talk to your nurse or doctor, visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening) or phone **0800 22 44 88**

# The Cervical Screening Test

## Put it on your list

Your First Test



- renew travel card ✓
- book haircut ✓
- go for screening test ✓
- buy cinema tickets ✓
- meet friends ✓

**NHS**  
SCOTLAND

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scotland**  
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

# Put it on your list. Take the cervical screening test and reduce your risk of cervical cancer.

If you have not been for a cervical screening test before, this leaflet provides information to help you to decide if you need a test and what to expect if you go. You can also visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening) for further information or speak to your doctor or nurse.

## What is a cervical screening test?

It is a test that involves checking the cells from your cervix (the neck of the womb) and a Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) test, where appropriate. The test (also known as the 'smear test') is designed to pick up any changes so that they can be easily and effectively monitored or treated. Without treatment, in some cases, the changes could eventually become cancerous.

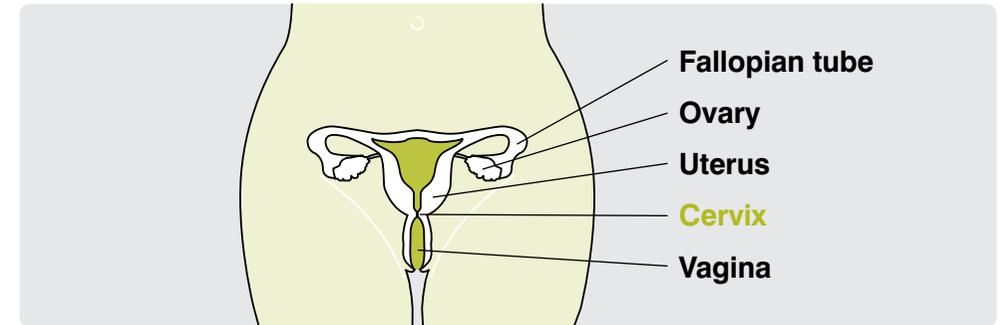
Cervical screening tests are for women who have no symptoms. You can look and feel perfectly healthy and still have changes in your cervix. That's why it is so important to go for regular cervical screening tests. For more information talk to your doctor or visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening)

## Who is offered a cervical screening test?

In Scotland, all women between the ages of 20 and 60 are offered a cervical screening test every three years. Some, but not all, changes found by cervical screening tests may give an early warning sign of the possibility of developing cervical cancer. By dealing with this at an early stage, many cervical cancers can be stopped before they even start. In this way, cervical

5 MINUTES

Your cervical screening test will last 5 minutes. Five minutes that can save your life



screening saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK and prevents 8 out of 10 cervical cancers from developing.

**Regular screening is your best protection against cervical cancer**

## I feel embarrassed

Many women feel embarrassed, especially before their first appointment. Talk to the person taking your test, they will understand. They will also try their best to help you to decide if you want to have a test and to make sure you feel as comfortable as possible.

Remember that in most clinics cervical screening tests are carried out all the time. By having a cervical screening test, you are helping to protect yourself from cervical cancer.



5,000

2 LIVES SAVED

Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK

8<sup>OUT</sup>  
OF 10

Cervical screening prevents 8 out of 10 cancers from developing

### What causes changes in my cervix?

Most changes are caused by HPV which can damage cells in the cervix. This is a very common virus. It is estimated that 8 out of 10 people in Scotland will catch it at some time in their lives. Many people have HPV without knowing because there are usually no symptoms. You can be exposed to HPV by being sexually intimate with another person who has the virus as HPV is mainly spread by skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity.

### How can HPV cause cervical cancer?

There are over 100 different types of HPV. Most types are harmless and only a few – around 15 – are associated with cancer and are called ‘high risk’ types. High risk types of HPV cause 99% of cases of cervical cancer.

Your body’s immune system fights off most HPV infections naturally, but about 1 in 10 infections are harder to get rid of. Sometimes HPV gets into the surface of a woman’s cervix. It may stay there for several years without doing any harm. Occasionally, however, HPV may start to damage the cells and cause them to change, which if left untreated can develop into cancer.

### HAVING THE CERVICAL SCREENING TEST

#### What will happen?

You will be asked to undress from the waist down (removing trousers and underwear), lie on your back on an examining couch, and bend your knees. Your doctor or nurse will gently insert a small tube called a speculum into your vagina to hold it open, so that they can see your cervix. The doctor or nurse will then gently brush cells from the cervix using a soft brush.

### Key points to remember

- ✓ Cervical screening reduces the risk of developing cervical cancer, and saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK.
- ✓ Most cervical cancer is caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), a virus that is very common and easily spread by sexual activity.
- ✓ You should have regular cervical screening even if you have been immunised against HPV.
- ✓ Cervical screening cannot pick up all changes to your cervix or prevent every case of cervical cancer.

The cells will be sent to a laboratory, where they will be examined under a microscope.

Some women prefer to wear a loose skirt that they can keep on during the test. Usually the person taking your test will offer you a sheet or blanket to cover yourself. If they don’t, you can ask for one.

#### How long will the test take?

The test takes just five minutes and you should be able to carry on as normal afterwards. The test should not be painful but you may find it uncomfortable.

**The test only takes five minutes and could save your life**

**Can I bring a friend or an interpreter with me when I have the test?**

If you would like to bring a friend or arrange an interpreter, check when making your appointment if this would be OK.

**What if I've never had sex before?**

If you've never had sexual intercourse, it is unlikely that you will need a cervical screening test. If you have not had sex there is less risk of you having HPV. HPV – the virus which causes 99% of cases of cervical cancer – is easily spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact, mainly during sexual activity.

The virus can in some cases be passed on through other forms of sexual activity apart from full intercourse. This applies to both heterosexual women and lesbians.

You can talk to your doctor or nurse for more information or visit

[www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening)

**If I've never had sexual intercourse won't a test hurt?**

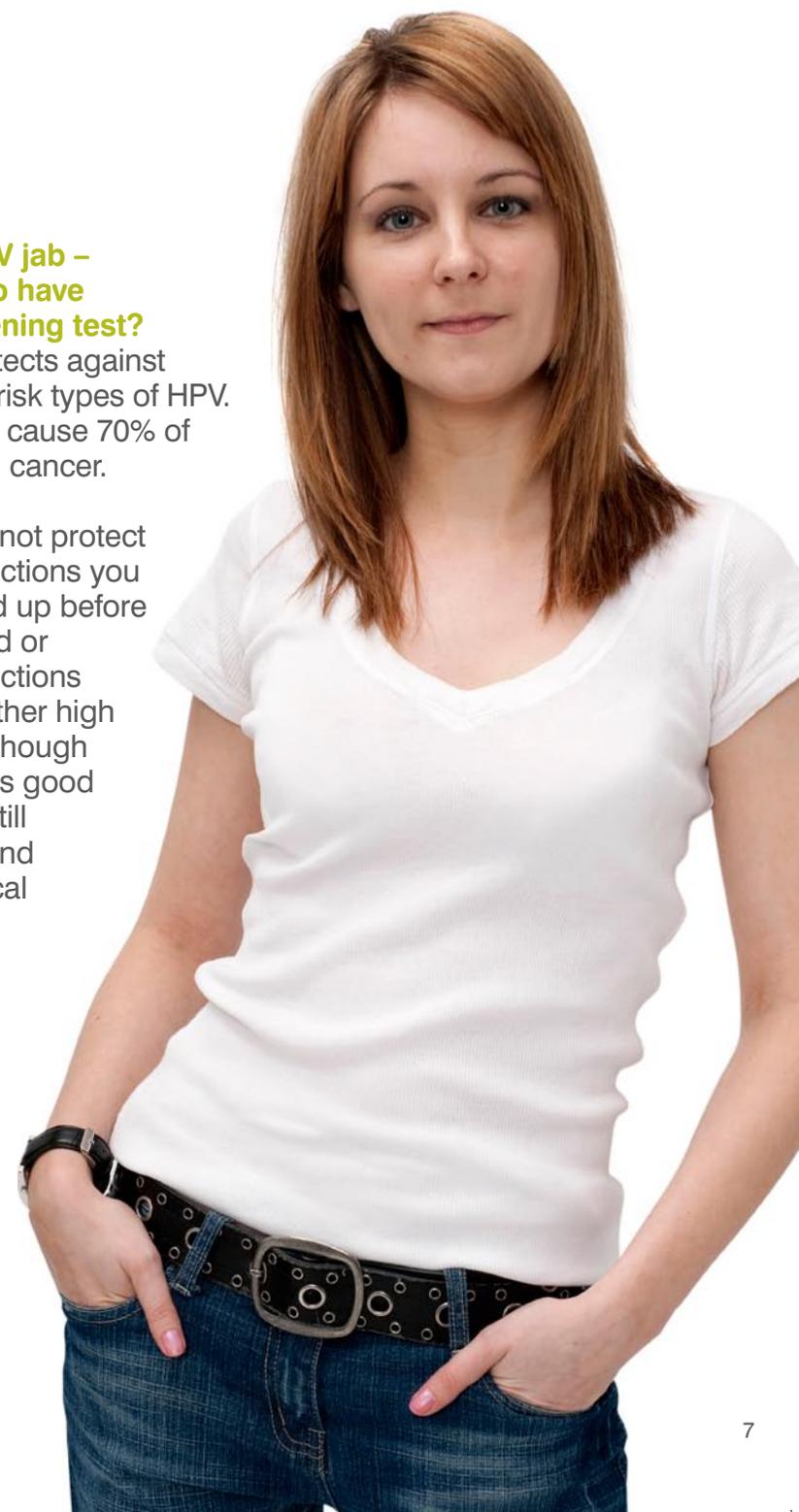
Although it is unlikely that you will need a cervical screening test, you should talk to your doctor or nurse if you are unsure. If you decide to have the test but have not had full intercourse, you should tell the doctor or nurse. This will let them choose the right size of speculum for the test. Similarly, if you've never used tampons, it would be helpful to tell the person taking your cervical screening test.

**Remember, you are in control and can say 'stop' at any time if you feel too uncomfortable**

**I've had the HPV jab – do I still need to have a cervical screening test?**

The vaccine protects against 2 of the 15 high risk types of HPV. These two types cause 70% of cases of cervical cancer.

The vaccine will not protect against HPV infections you may have picked up before being immunised or against HPV infections caused by the other high risk types. So although the vaccine offers good protection, it is still important to attend for regular cervical screening tests.



EVERY  
3 years

A cervical screening test every 3 years will significantly reduce your risk of cervical cancer



**Put it on your list. Take the cervical screening test and reduce your risk of cervical cancer**

**5** MINUTES

Your cervical screening test will last 5 minutes. Five minutes that can save your life

**I'm still unsure about having a test**

Cervical cancer is rare but it does affect younger women more than other cancers that you might have heard of, for example breast cancer.

The good news is that **it can be prevented** and any changes detected by going for your cervical screening test can be monitored or treated easily and effectively.

If you are unsure about having the test, you can talk to your doctor or nurse. You can still choose not to have a test but speaking to a doctor or nurse will ensure you make an informed decision about what is best for you.

If you decide not to have a cervical screening test because you feel it is not appropriate for you, you will be routinely invited again in three years time and can decide then if your circumstances have changed.

You can look and feel perfectly healthy and still have changes in your cervix. That's why it is so important to go for regular cervical screening. For more information, talk to your doctor or visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening)

**If you are unsure about having the test, you can talk to your doctor or nurse**

**5,000**  
LIVES SAVED

Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK

8<sup>OUT</sup>  
OF 10

Cervical screening  
prevents 8 out of 10  
cancers from developing

### **Making an appointment**

You will get a leaflet with your invitation to screening, called *The Cervical Screening Test*. This tells you all about the screening process, so that you can decide whether or not you would like to be screened. A copy of the leaflet can be viewed or downloaded from [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening)

Most women have the cervical screening test carried out at their GP surgery by their doctor or the nurse. If you prefer, you can usually go to your local clinic. These are known as well woman, sexual health or family planning clinics.

To find details of your local services go to [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening) or call the **NHS Helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

It is best to make an appointment for a day when you will not have your period. During your period it is difficult for the doctor or nurse to get a clear view of your cervix.

**You can ask for a female doctor or nurse when you book your appointment**

You should report any symptoms such as an unusual discharge or bleeding, including bleeding after sex or between periods, to your doctor as soon as possible.

**Cervical screening reduces the risk of developing cervical cancer, and saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK**

NHS 24

For further info visit  
[www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening)  
or call the NHS Helpline on 0800 22 44 88