

NOW ITS TIME TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF...

1. What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening involves a simple procedure called a cervical smear test, which shows if there are any changes in the cells of the cervix (neck of the womb).

2. What is a cervical smear test?

A cervical smear is a screening test done to look for early changes in the cells of the cervix - neck of the womb, which if not found and treated could become cancer cells. The earlier a change is found the easier it is to treat.

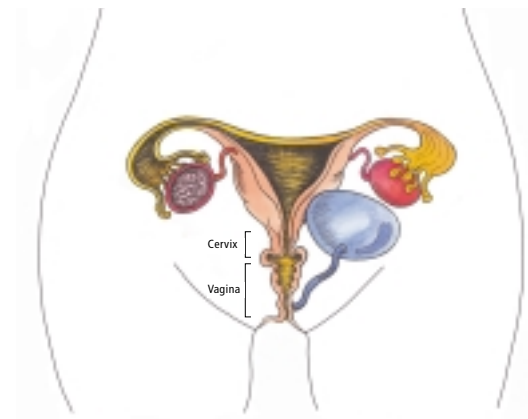
As with all screening tests, cervical screening may not always be 100% accurate. There is a small risk that abnormal cells will not be picked up in a cervical smear test. However any abnormal cells will usually be picked up on future smears. This is why it is important to have regular smear tests.

3. Who should have a cervical smear test?

All women between 25 to 60 years of age should have regular smear tests whether married, single, heterosexual or lesbian. You need to continue with regular smear tests after the menopause.

4. Why should women have this test?

Quite simply regular cervical smear tests could save your life. A smear test detects early changes in the neck of the womb. The earlier a change is found the easier it is to treat.

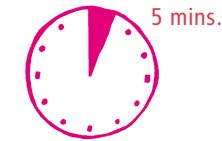


5. When is the best time to have your cervical smear test?

The best time to attend for your cervical smear test is mid-cycle or about 2 weeks after your period (if you are having periods).

6. How is a cervical smear test done?

The smear test is a very simple procedure taking less than 5 minutes. It may be slightly uncomfortable for a moment but should not be painful. You may lie on your side or on your back for the smear. The doctor or nurse will gently insert a speculum into your vagina to hold it open. The cervix is the area where the uterus (womb) opens into the top of the vagina. The doctor or nurse will use a small spatula or tiny special broom to gently remove a sample of cells from the cervix. The sample is sent to the laboratory to be checked.



7. What if I've had a hysterectomy?

If you have had a hysterectomy (womb removed) you should check with your doctor if you need to continue with cervical screening.

8. Where can I have a cervical smear test?

You can have a cervical smear test from any of the following:

- Doctors
- Nurses

9. What happens after I have my test?

Your Smeartaker will advise if any treatment is required or if the smear test needs to be repeated. Approximately 1 in 10 tests show some abnormality and needs follow up.

10. How often will I be offered the test?

If it is your first ever smear, you should have another one a year later. If your result is normal you should have future smear tests every 5 years. If your result is not normal you may need to have a repeat smear or more specialised tests. Your Smeartaker will advise when your next smear test is due.

If you have any unusual or irregular vaginal bleeding, spotting or discharge do not wait for your smear test, contact your doctor immediately.

The majority of smear tests are normal. Even a result that is not normal is unlikely to mean you have cancer. It may be an infection or minor cell changes.

11. How do I get my result?

Your result details and advice of follow-up will be available from the person who took your smear test.

12. I'm afraid of what the result might mean...

The majority of smear tests are normal. Even a result that is not normal is unlikely to mean you have cancer. It may be an infection or minor cell changes. The earlier a change is found the easier it is to treat. There is a 1 in 10 chance that a smear result will mean going back to your doctor. Do not be alarmed if you are recalled.

13. What if my smear test is not normal?

You may be required to have a repeat smear or a more detailed examination of the cervix using a type of microscope (colposcopy). These abnormal cells on the cervix can be easily treated to prevent them later developing into cancer cells.

The cervical smear test can also detect cancer cells when cancer has actually developed so that early treatment can be given to halt its spread.

14. What are the symptoms of cancer of the cervix?

The most common symptom is vaginal bleeding after intercourse. Bleeding between periods is abnormal and should be investigated. Bleeding following the menopause is also abnormal and should be reported to your doctor for investigation. However it is important to realise that you may not have any warning symptoms, in which case detection is by examining cells from the cervix.

15. How can I reduce my risk of getting cervical cancer?

Everything about the cause of cervical cancer is not yet known but following this advice can reduce the risks: -

- Have a regular smear test to pick up any early problems
- Stop smoking
- Visit your doctor if you have symptoms such as vaginal discharge, irregular vaginal bleeding, painful intercourse, bleeding after intercourse or bleeding following the menopause.

Screening
can prevent loss of lives

Cancer of the cervix is the third most common female cancer. There is a lifetime risk that about 1 in 100 Irish women will develop cancer of the cervix. However it is very preventable.

Doctors contact details



Further information available on
www.icsp.ie

ABOUT YOUR SMEAR TEST

SCREENING CAN PREVENT LOSS OF LIVES

