



# Cervical Screening

## Frequently Asked Questions



States of Guernsey  
Public Health Services

## What is cervical screening?

The Cervical Screening Programme now uses human papillomavirus (HPV) testing as a new cervical screening test. This test specifically looks for the presence of HPV. Cervical screening isn't a test for cancer, it's a test to check the health of the cells of the cervix.

## What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus that can be transmitted during intimate sexual contact. Most people acquire HPV at some point in their lives, and in most cases will get rid of the virus without ever knowing they have had it. HPV is linked to the development of abnormal cervical cells. If left untreated, these abnormal cells might develop into cervical cancer.

## Why is the cervical screening test changing?

HPV is a common virus that can cause changes to cells in the cervix, which can develop into cervical cancer. Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. The latest medical and scientific evidence shows that HPV testing is more effective at detecting HPV and cervical abnormalities at an earlier stage and can therefore identify those people at higher risk of cervical problems one step earlier.

## Do I have to pay for cervical screening?

Cervical screening is free in the Bailiwick. The free screening service was introduced locally in 2019.

## Who needs cervical screening?

If you are a woman or a person with a cervix aged between 25 and 65 years of age and have ever been sexually active, you should have a cervical screening according to screening recommendations. You still need to have cervical screening even if you:

- ▶ are well and have no symptoms
- ▶ have a learning disability
- ▶ have received the HPV vaccine
- ▶ have only had one sexual partner
- ▶ identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender (and still have a cervix), and/or Intersex (LGBTI)
- ▶ no longer have periods/are past menopause or going through menopause
- ▶ are no longer sexually active
- ▶ have had a hysterectomy (your doctor will advise if you no longer require the Cervical Screening Test).

## Who will be invited for screening?

Anyone with a cervix who is registered with a GP will be offered HPV testing:

- ▶ **aged 25 to 49 - every 3 years**
- ▶ **aged 50 to 65 - every 5 years**

A letter will be sent to eligible people by their GP practice asking them to make an appointment with their GP or nurse. People can also choose to have the test done at the local contraceptive or sexual health clinic (Choices or Orchard Centre).

## What about people who are not registered with a GP?

People who are not registered with a GP practice will not receive invitations for screening but can request a screening at Choices or the Orchard Centre.

## What does HPV testing involve?

It is a quick and simple test in which the GP or nurse collects sample of cells from the cervix and sends them to the lab for analysis. The procedure only takes a few minutes and is mildly uncomfortable. We encourage people to talk to their GP or nurse if they have any questions or concerns.

## Where can people have cervical screening?

People can choose to be screened at their GP practice or Choices or the Orchard Centre.

## What happens at my screening appointment?

Screening test results will be sent to people in the post, with a copy sent to their GP. Most people will be told that they don't need any further investigation and they'll simply be called back for screening again in 3 to 5 years (depending on their age). People who are told that they need further investigation will be monitored more closely for potential cell changes.

## Why are people under 25 and over 65 not invited for screening?

Cervical cancer is linked to persistent infection with HPV which is extremely rare in people under the age of 25 with just 2.6 cases per 100,000 people in the UK. HPV is a very common virus, which can cause minor abnormalities in the cells of the cervix. In the great majority of younger people, the infection and the abnormalities go away naturally. If these people were screened they would test positive and be sent for unnecessary treatment.

The natural history and progression of cervical cancer means it is highly unlikely that people of 65 and over will go on to develop the disease if their last three tests were negative. People over the age of 65 who have never had cervical screening or have not been tested since the age of 50 can request a test.

## Do people still need a cervical screening test if they've had the HPV vaccination?

Yes - vaccinated people are advised to continue accepting their invitations for cervical screening as the vaccine will not prevent all types of cervical cancer.

## What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

If you have any unusual symptoms such as bleeding between periods or after the menopause, pain/ bleeding during sex or unpleasant discharge-contact your GP straight away. To reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer, people are advised to eat healthily, stop smoking, keep fit and attend screening when invited.



## Where can people get more information on cervical screening?

For any questions or concerns, people are advised to:

- ▶ **Speak to their GP or nurse**
- ▶ **Read our cervical screening leaflet at [www.gov.gg/screening](http://www.gov.gg/screening)**

### Useful links

- ▶ [www.gov.gg/screening](http://www.gov.gg/screening)
- ▶ [www.nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening/)
- ▶ [www.jostrust.org.uk/](http://www.jostrust.org.uk/)
- ▶ [www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer)
- ▶ [www.gov.gg/healthyliving](http://www.gov.gg/healthyliving)
- ▶ [www.lgbt.foundation](http://www.lgbt.foundation)





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