

For all women aged 25-65



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 women 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 women at higher risk of cervical problems one step earlier.

Who will be invited for screening?



All women who are 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 women by their GP practice asking them to make an appointment with their GP or nurse. Women can also choose to have the test done at the local contraceptive or sexual health clinic (Choices or Orchard clinic).

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 women to talk to their GP or nurse if they have any questions or concerns.

What will women notice when HPV testing is introduced?



The good news is that the procedure to collect cells from the cervix will remain the same. It will involve a speculum examination and sample of cells will be collected and sent to the lab. This means what happens at a women's cervical screening appointment will not change. However, the processing and analysis of the samples in the laboratory will be different. Samples will be tested for HPV first before looking for cell changes.

What happens after HPV testing?



Screening test results will be sent to women in the post, with a copy sent to their GP. Most women 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). Women who are told that they need further investigation will be monitored more closely for potential cell changes.

What is the difference between HPV testing and current cervical screening?



In the current cervical screening, the sample of cells that is collected from the cervix is first examined under a microscope (cytology) to look for any abnormal cells that could go on to develop into cervical cancer. With HPV primary screening, a cervical screening sample is first tested for the presence of an HPV infection.



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



Yes - vaccinated women 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 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, women are advised to eat healthily, stop smoking, keep fit and attend screening when invited.



Where can women get more information on cervical screening?

For any questions or concerns, women are advised to:

- ▶ **Speak to their GP or nurse**
- ▶ **Read our cervical screening leaflet at www.gov.gg/screening**

Useful links

- ▶ www.gov.gg/screening
- ▶ www.nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening/
- ▶ www.jostrust.org.uk/
- ▶ www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer
- ▶ www.gov.gg/healthyliving





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