

## **I don't think I need the test...**

Well, the decision is entirely up to you. But you should know that you may be at increased risk if any of the following apply to you:

- ❖ you smoke
- ❖ you have had several sexual partners (or your sexual partner has)
- ❖ you started having sex at an early age
- ❖ you were pregnant at an early age, or have had five or more pregnancies
- ❖ you have, or have ever had, genital warts
- ❖ you have been taking oral contraceptives ("the pill") for several years
- ❖ you are taking medicines to suppress your immune system, e.g. after an organ transplant

## **I can't decide. Can I discuss the test with someone?**

Of course. Speak to the smear taker nurse at your doctor's practice, or the smear taker in your local community clinic. You can also get more information on cervical screening on the Internet at [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical).

**The best way to protect yourself against cancer of the cervix is to have a regular smear test. Why take the risk? If you are due for a test, contact your GP surgery today to make an appointment or go to a community clinic and ask for a smear test.**

***The smear test – because prevention is better than cure***

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# The Smear Test

## Why it's important

### Answers

**to your frequently asked questions  
about smear tests**

Every 3 years for women aged 25-49  
Every 5 years for women aged 50-64

***Cervical cancer can be prevented  
by having regular smear tests***

***The smear test - because prevention is better than cure***

# "Should I go for a smear test?"

*So you've received an invitation to go for a smear test, and now you're wondering whether to go or not. Here is some information to help you decide...*

## **What is the smear test?**

It is a simple test to check the health of the neck of the womb to rule out any changes which could develop into cervical cancer if not found and treated.

## **What causes cervical cancer?**

Over 95% of cervical cancers are caused by a virus infection, HPV, which is quite common in both men and women and transmitted during sex. Usually it doesn't cause any symptoms, but some types of HPV infection also cause warts. Some cases of cervical cancer seem to occur without HPV infection.

## **Who is the smear test for?**

The test is free and available to all women aged 25-64 who still have a cervix (neck of the womb) – so it isn't needed by women who have had their womb totally removed (total hysterectomy). It is particularly important for women who have ever had sex. They are much more likely to be at risk than virgins. Women aged 25-49 should have a test every three years, and women aged 50-64 every five years.

## **How long does it take?**

It takes only a few minutes and can be done by a trained nurse in your own GP practice or in a community clinic.

## **Does it hurt?**

No, but it may be a bit uncomfortable for some women. Any discomfort lasts for only a few minutes – and it could save you having more serious problems later.

## **What if I'm pregnant?**

If you are pregnant then the test can wait until after your pregnancy, unless you are 28 or over and have never had a test or it has been more than three years since your last test. If you are pregnant and your last test was abnormal then you should not delay the test until after your pregnancy – speak to the smear-taker nurse at your doctor's practice.

## **I missed my last test. Can I still go?**

Yes, if you are overdue for a smear test you can have one at any time – just contact your GP practice or go to a community clinic.

## **I'm afraid to find out if I have cancer...**

The test is not about finding cancer – it's to rule out any of the very earliest changes in the neck of the womb which are not cancer but which could develop into cancer later if not discovered and dealt with. Prevention is better than cure!

## **What proportion of smear tests are normal?**

About 95% of tests are normal. Of the remainder, about 4% require more regular follow up than every 3 or 5 years. One percent require further investigation by colposcopy examination at your local hospital. This is a simple out-patient examination of the neck of the womb during which any abnormal cells can usually be treated.

## **How long does it take to get the result of a smear test?**

You should get the result of your smear test within six weeks.