

Cervical Screening

What Pacific women need
to know

www.timetoscreen.nz



**Time to
screen**

National
Cervical
Screening
Programme

Who needs a cervical screening test?

If you have ever been sexually active, you are advised to have regular cervical screening every three years from age 25 until you turn 70.

If you have had a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus) you need to check with your health provider if you still need to be screened.



Cervical cancer and human papillomavirus

- Almost all cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV), which is spread by sexual activity. Eighty percent of people who have been sexually active will have an HPV infection at some point in their lives.
- There are many types of HPV. Most HPV infections will clear up by themselves.
- Only a few types of HPV will lead to abnormal, precancerous cells that could progress to cancer.
- Cervical cancer usually takes many years to develop. Any abnormal cells can be found and treated to stop them from becoming cancer.

HPV (cervical cancer) vaccine

If you have received the HPV vaccine you must continue with cervical screening. This is because it is still possible for abnormal changes to develop, even though it is a lot less likely after vaccination.



Having regular cervical screening is important to identify cell changes and prevent cervical cancer from developing.

How accurate is cervical screening?

There is always a small chance that some abnormal cells may not be found by the test. Abnormal changes progress very slowly, so it is very likely that any abnormal cells that are missed will be picked up at the next test.

On the other hand, there is also a small chance a result will say that abnormal cells have been found when your cervix is normal. A further cervical screening test or colposcopy may confirm this.

Having the test

Cervical screening only takes a few minutes. You may find it a little uncomfortable, but it should not hurt.

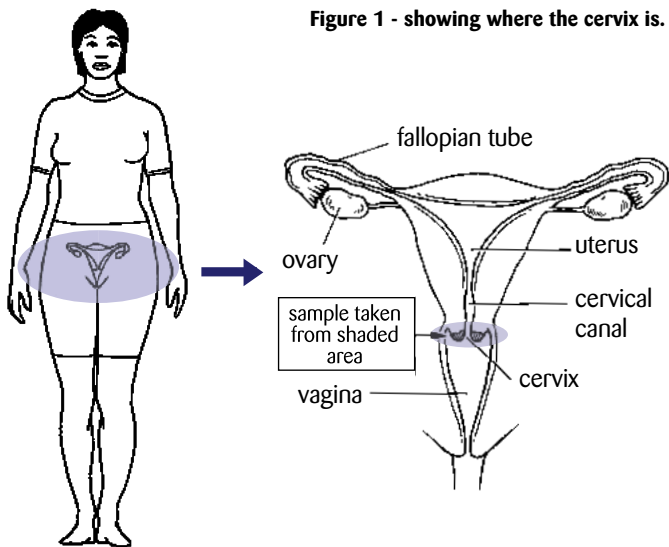
A few cells will be collected from your cervix (the neck of the womb) and placed into a liquid solution that preserves the cells for testing. The test looks for abnormal cells.

Abnormal cells can be treated to prevent them from becoming cancer.

In some situations you may be offered an HPV test - which tests for the virus that may lead to cervical cancer. The HPV test is performed on the same sample as the cervical screening test, so there is no need to have a second test.



Figure 1 - showing where the cervix is.





About your results

Most test results are normal.

You may be asked to go back for another test if there were not enough cells in the sample, or if there are changes. An abnormal result hardly ever means cancer.

The National Cervical Screening Programme

The programme aims to prevent cervical cancer. All women who have cervical screening are part of the programme unless they say they do not want to be.

The benefits of recording cervical screening information include:

- ready availability of records to you, your health provider and the laboratory analysing your tests
- automatic reminder letters if you are overdue for having a cervical screening test

- checks to ensure the right follow-up after an abnormal screening test
- planning for the needs of different ethnic groups.

What information is collected or used?

Cervical screening and colposcopy results are recorded on the National Cervical Screening Programme Register (NCSP Register). The information can be used by the programme for monitoring and evaluation under strict rules of confidentiality. De-identified laboratory specimens and results may be used for quality control or teaching purposes.

Withdrawing from the programme

You can withdraw from the programme at any time by filling in a form or by writing to the programme. When you withdraw, any cervical screening tests recorded on the register will be deleted and future tests are not recorded.

How much will the test cost?

Most women are charged a fee for the test. Some health providers offer a free or low cost test.

Who does the test?

- Your GP - there are many female GPs who provide this service
- Practice nurses
- Pacific health services
- Community health services or women's health services
- Family Planning clinics.

Important

If you have any unusual bleeding, pain or discharge see your doctor or nurse.

For further information

Contact the National Cervical Screening Programme on freephone **0800 729 729**, or visit the website: **www.timetoscreen.nz**

The National Cervical Screening Programme also has the following resources:

- **Cervical Screening: What you need to know**, code HE1256
- **Cervical Screening: Understanding cervical screening test results**, code HE4598
- **Colposcopy: Information for women**, code HE1202.



If you change your address, please advise your health provider, and the National Cervical Screening Programme, on freephone **0800 729 729** or email **info@ncspregister.health.nz**.

www.timetoscreen.nz



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New Zealand Government



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