Cervical Screening
What Pacific women need to know

www.timetoscreen.nz

The majority of women will have normal results. Some women 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 that they do not want to be.

The benefits of recording cervical screening information include:
• ready availability of records to you, your smear taker 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.

The information collected by the programme is stored on a computer system called the NCSP Register, which is managed by the Ministry of Health.

Any woman 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?
You may be charged the usual fee from your doctor or nurse. Some community or primary health organisations offer a free or low-cost service.

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 or visit the website: www.timetoscreen.nz

The National Cervical Screening Programme also has the following resources:
• Cervical Screening: What women 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.

Who needs a cervical screening test?

All women who have ever been sexually active are advised to have cervical screening every three years from the time they turn 20 until they turn 70.
Cervical cancer and human papillomavirus

- Cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is spread by sexual activity and affects almost all people 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

Women who have received the HPV vaccine 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.
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How good is cervical screening?
Cervical screening, like all screening, is not 100% effective and some women will still develop cervical cancer despite regular screening. While the risk of cervical cancer can be reduced, it cannot be eliminated by screening. Other tests, eg, testing for HPV may be used to help decide when treatment is necessary.

Having the test
Cervical screening only takes a few minutes. Some women 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, women having cervical screening will also 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.
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Figure 1 - showing where the cervix is.

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

The majority of women will have normal results. Some women 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.

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