

Cervical Cancer

Awareness, prevention and support



What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is cancer of the cervix – the opening from the top of the vagina to the womb.

What causes cervical cancer?

The main cause of cervical cancer is a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). There are many different types of HPV. Most are harmless but some can cause abnormal cell changes that may develop into cervical cancer. HPV can be passed on through close skin-to-skin contact, usually during sexual activity.

How common is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women worldwide. Yet in the UK, fewer than 1 in 100 women and people with a cervix will develop cervical cancer. This is because of the effective NHS cervical screening programme and the HPV vaccine, which is offered to children 12–13 and young people aged 24 and younger who missed getting vaccinated as a child.

Who can get cervical cancer?

Anyone with a cervix, that is women and people assigned female at birth who have a cervix. Most cervical cancer cases are diagnosed in those aged 30 to 45, but can occur at any age if the cervix is present. Risk drops after 65 if screening has been regular and the results normal. Those who have had persistent HPV or not been vaccinated against HPV are at higher risk.

How preventable is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancer types. In fact, according to Cancer Research UK, 99.8% of cervical cancer cases in the UK are preventable. Regular cervical screening, practising safe sex, not smoking and maintaining a healthy weight can all help to lower risk. Studies show that the HPV vaccine prevents around 90% of cervical cancers.

Why is cervical screening important?

Cervical screening helps prevent cervical cancer from developing and saves thousands of lives every year in the UK, so it's important to attend screenings when invited, and to talk to your GP if you notice any changes.

Who is eligible for cervical screening?

Anyone with a cervix between ages 25 and 64 is eligible for cervical screening, which includes many trans men and non-binary people. Eligible people will usually be invited for screening every five years.

30%

of women are confused about their eligibility for cervical screening.

18–29%

of women aged 24–49 mistakenly think they're not eligible for cervical screening.

57–58%

say they would be more likely to attend screening with virtual support.

What happens during a cervical screening appointment?

- You'll be asked to undress from the waist down and lie back on a bed, usually with your legs bent, feet together and knees apart.
- The nurse or doctor will gently put a smooth, tube-shaped tool (a speculum) into your vagina and open it so they can see your cervix.
- Using a soft brush, they'll take a small sample of cells from your cervix, to test for HPV.
- When the test is complete, you can get dressed. You'll be told when you can expect the results.

You can request a female doctor or nurse, and bring a friend or relative with you if this would help you feel more comfortable.



What happens after a screening appointment?



The results are usually sent in the NHS app or by letter. Some people may be asked to call their GP for the results. There are four possible results:

01

HPV negative. Most people get this result. You'll be invited for screening again in five years.

02

An unclear result. You'll be asked to book another test in three months.

03

An HPV positive result with no abnormal cell changes. You'll be asked to return in one year, and again a year after that to check the HPV.

04

An HPV positive result with abnormal cell changes. You'll be asked to attend another test called a colposcopy.

If your cervical screening results are taking longer than expected, that does not mean anything is wrong.

What signs or symptoms should people be aware of?

You should visit your GP if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Unusual vaginal bleeding, including after the menopause, after sex, or between periods
- Changes to vaginal discharge
- Pain or discomfort during sex
- Unexplained pain in your lower back or the area between the hips (pelvis)

Do these symptoms mean someone definitely has cervical cancer?

No. The symptoms above can be caused by many things other than cancer but if they are new for you it's important to get them checked by a GP.

Whole Human Cancer Care, from Risk to Recovery.

Contact us to find out more hello@percihealth.com or visit percihealth.com