

Cervical Screening Test

What is the Cervical Screening Test?

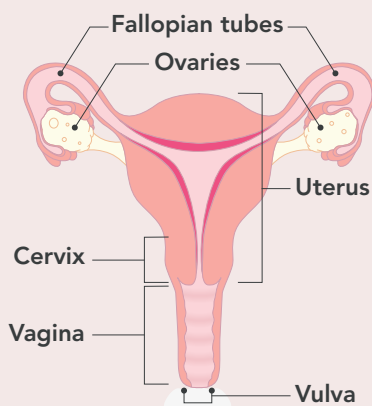
The Cervical Screening Test is a simple procedure that checks your cervix for the presence of the human papillomavirus (HPV).

The cervix is part of the female reproductive system. It connects the top of the vagina with the base of the uterus (womb).

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by HPV.

If you are 25 to 74 years old, have a cervix and have ever been sexually active with a person of any gender, you need to have a Cervical Screening Test.

Diagram of the female reproductive system



What was the Pap test?

The Pap test was the old screening test for cervical cancer. In 2017 it was replaced by the Cervical Screening Test.

The Pap test used to look for cell changes in the cervix, then test for HPV, the cause of nearly all cervical cancers. The Cervical Screening Test looks for HPV, then the cells are checked to see if there are any changes. In this way, the newer test is a step ahead of the Pap test.

What else is different about the Cervical Screening Test?

- Pap tests had to be done every two years, but most women will only need a Cervical Screening Test every five years, if their results are normal.
- Pap tests were done from the age of 18, but Cervical Screening Tests are recommended from the age of 25 to 69. Women aged 70-74 will be invited to have an exit test (a final test)
- The test is done the same way – your doctor will take a small sample of cells from your cervix using a swab. It may feel a little uncomfortable, but should not hurt and only takes a couple of minutes.

If your test shows you do not have HPV infection it is safe to wait five years between tests, as it usually takes 10 or more years for HPV to develop into cervical cancer.

I have had the HPV vaccine, do I still need to be tested?

Yes. The HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV infection that are known to cause cervical cancer. That's why it's important that you still get tested every five years, if your previous test result is normal.

What do I need to do now?

- It is very important that you keep to the current schedule of five-yearly tests. Most cervical cancers are preventable, but early detection is key.
- If your results are normal, you will receive a reminder from the National Cancer Screening Register in five years, when your next Cervical Screening Test is due.
- If the test shows you have HPV, your doctor will discuss your results and next steps for treatment with you.
- If you have any new symptoms (including pain, painful sex or abnormal bleeding or discharge) in the time between your tests, make an appointment with your GP as soon as possible to discuss these changes.



What else can I do to prevent cervical cancer?

- Take actions to decrease your risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI); for example, always using protection such as condoms or dams
- Consider the HPV vaccine. If you were not vaccinated as part of the school-based program, speak to your GP about whether this option is right for you
- Quitting smoking (or never starting) is a key step in protecting yourself from, and reducing your risk of, cervical cancer.

For more information go to jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/health-checks

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. This fact sheet generally uses the terms 'women' and 'girls'. These terms are intended to include women with diverse sexualities, intersex women, and women with a transgender experience.

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