



Cervical cancer screening



Cervical Cancer begins when abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix grow uncontrollably.

Anyone with a cervix can get cancer – women, transgender men and intersex people. Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. All women aged 25–74 should have a cervical screening test every 5 years, even if you have had the HPV vaccine. Talk to your doctor about cervical screening if you are overdue or unsure or have known risk factors.

Risk factors

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by an infection called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a common infection that affects the surface of different parts of the body, such as the cervix, vagina and skin.

There are also other known risk factors:

- Smoking and passive smoking – chemicals in tobacco can damage the cells of the cervix, making cancer more likely to develop in women with HPV
- Using oral contraceptive (the pill) for a long time – research has shown that taking the pill for five years or more increases the risk of developing cervical cancer in people with HPV
- Having a weakened immune system – the immune system helps rid the body of HPV. Women with a weakened immune system have an increased risk of developing cervical cancer and will need to have more frequent cervical screening tests. This includes women with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and women who take medicines that lower their immunity.

Symptoms of Cervical Cancer

In the early stages, cervical cancer usually has no symptoms. The only way to know if there are abnormal cells in the cervix, which may develop into cervical cancer, is to have a cervical screening test.

If symptoms occur, they usually include:

- Vaginal bleeding between periods, after menopause or during or after sexual intercourse

- Pelvic pain
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- An unusual vaginal discharge
- Heavier periods or periods that last longer than usual.

Although these symptoms can also be caused by other conditions, it is very important to rule out cervical cancer. See your general practitioner (GP) if you are worried or the symptoms are ongoing. This is important for anyone with a cervix, whether straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex make sure you are up to date with your screening tests.

National Cervical Screening Program

The National Cervical Screening Program detects cervical cancer. The cervical screening test checks for the presence of the human papillomavirus (HPV). The aim of the program is to pick up changes and early cancers in healthy individuals. The earlier cancer is detected, the better the outcomes and long-term survival.

The Australian Government's National Cervical Screening Program has changed. All women, and anyone with a cervix, aged between 25 and 74 years are invited to have a Cervical Screening Test. The test is done every five years.

The test is a simple procedure to check the health of your cervix. It looks and feels the same as the pap test, but tests for the human papillomavirus (known as HPV).



Your first Cervical Screening Test is due when you turn 25 or two years after your last pap test. After that, you will only need to have the test every five years if your results are normal.

Even if you have had the HPV vaccination, you still need to take part in regular cervical screening. The HPV vaccine and regular cervical screening is your best protection against cervical cancer. If you are due for your cervical screening test, contact your doctor to book an appointment.

Self collection

As part of the National Cervical Screening Program, there is an option to collect your sample yourself. Self-collection is when a patient takes her own sample for cervical screening. The sample is taken with a long cotton swab and is done under the supervision of a healthcare professional who also offers cervical screening. You will be given instructions on how to collect the sample and offered a private place to collect your sample.

Self collection is an option currently available for women who have never participated in the NCSP and are 30 years of age or over; or are overdue for cervical screening by two years or longer and are 30 years of age or over.

From 1 July 2022 all women and people with a cervix screening under the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) will have the choice to screen using either self collection or a clinician-collected sample. Both screening options will still be accessed through your healthcare provider.

For more information about Cervical Screening:

- Visit the Cancer Council Cervical Screening webpage www.cancer.org.au/cervicalscreening or call **13 11 20**
- Visit the National Cervical Screening Program website www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/national-cervical-screening-program or call **13 15 56**.