

# The Cervical Screening Test Put it on your list

Information for Lesbian and Bisexual Women



- renew travel card ✓
- book haircut ✓
- go for screening test ✓
- buy cinema tickets ✓
- meet friends ✓

# Put it on your list.

This is a leaflet about cervical screening tests for women who have sex with women.

**All women who have ever had penetrative sex (e.g. with men, or using fingers or sex toys) need regular cervical screening**

For an individual who has never had penetration of any sort, it may not be necessary. If you have any doubts, you can discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

## Who is offered a cervical screening test?

In Scotland, all women between the ages of 20 and 60 are offered a cervical screening test every three years. Some, but not all, changes found by cervical screening tests may give an early warning sign of the possibility of developing cervical cancer. By dealing with this at an early stage, many cervical cancers

can be stopped before they even start. In this way, cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK and prevents 8 out of 10 cervical cancers from developing.

**Regular screening is your best protection against cervical cancer**

## What is a cervical screening test?

It is a test that involves checking the cells from your cervix (the neck of the womb) and a Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) test, where appropriate. The test (also known as the 'smear test') is designed to pick up any changes so that they can be easily and effectively monitored or treated.

5,000

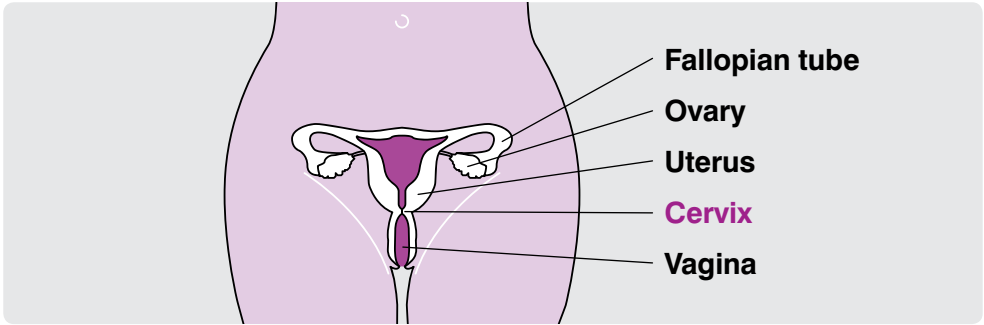
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LIVES SAVED

Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives every year in the UK

5 MINUTES

Your cervical screening test will last 5 minutes. Five minutes that can save your life



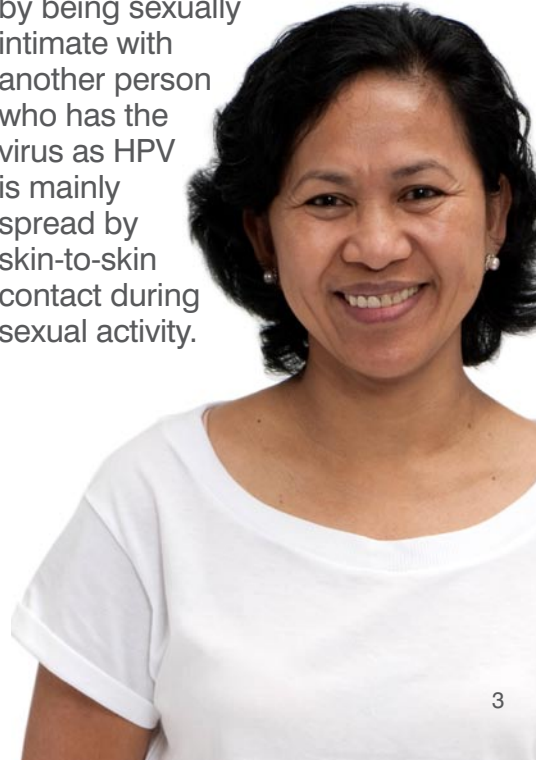
Without treatment, in some cases, the changes could eventually become cancerous.

Cervical screening tests are for women who have no symptoms. You can look and feel perfectly healthy and still have changes in your cervix. That's why it is so important to go for regular cervical screening tests. For more information talk to your doctor or nurse, or visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening)

### What causes changes in my cervix?

Most changes are caused by HPV, which can damage cells in the cervix. This is a very common virus. It is estimated that 8 out of 10 people in Scotland

will catch it at some time in their lives. Many people have HPV without knowing because there are usually no symptoms. You can be exposed to HPV by being sexually intimate with another person who has the virus as HPV is mainly spread by skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity.



## The myths

The notion that lesbians do not need a screening test comes from two main ideas:

- Lesbians have never had sex with a man.
- Women who have not had sex with a man are not at risk of cervical cancer.

## The facts

Data collected from the Audre Lorde and Bernhard sexual health clinics for lesbians showed that:

- 1 in 10 lesbians had changes detected through cervical screening tests.
- 4 out of 5 lesbians had experienced penetrative sex with a man. 10.9% of this group had changes.
- 1 in 20 lesbians who have never had penetrative sex with a man had changes in the cervix.

## How can HPV cause cervical cancer?

There are over 100 different types of HPV. Most types are harmless and only a few – around 15 – are associated with cancer and are called 'high risk' types. High risk types of HPV cause 99% of cases of cervical cancer.

Your body's immune system fights off most HPV infections naturally, but about 1 in 10 infections are harder to get rid of. Sometimes HPV gets into the surface of a woman's cervix.

It may stay there for several years without doing any harm. Occasionally, however, HPV may start to damage the cells and cause them to change, which if left untreated can develop into cancer.

## Can lesbian and bisexual women get sexually transmitted infections?

Yes, lesbian and bisexual women are at risk of sexually transmitted

8 OUT OF 10

Cervical screening prevents 8 out of 10 cancers from developing

infections. All sexually transmitted infections and vaginal infections can affect lesbians and women who have sex with women: all sexually transmitted infections can be passed on between women, through oral sex, through transferring vaginal fluids on hands and fingers and through sharing sex toys.

**Information on how to avoid passing sexually transmitted infections during sex with another woman is available from [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)**

### **Making an appointment**

Most women have the cervical screening test carried out at their GP surgery by their doctor or the nurse. If you prefer, you can usually go to your local clinic. These are known as well woman, sexual health or family planning clinics. To find details of your local services go to [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening) or call the **NHS Helpline** on **0800 22 44 88**.

It is best to make an appointment for a day when you will not have your period. During your period it is difficult for the doctor or nurse to get a clear view of your cervix.

### **Will I be asked about my sexual orientation at my screening appointment?**

No, and you don't need to tell the person taking your test. However some women may find that they get asked sexual health questions more appropriate for heterosexual women such as 'do you use contraception?'. You may wish to mention your sexual orientation so that the information you are asked for, or given, is more appropriate.

**More information on coming out to health professionals is available from [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)**

## **I feel anxious**

Tell your doctor or nurse if you are feeling anxious. Remember that in most clinics cervical screening tests are carried out all the time and they will be happy to talk through any concerns.

Try to breathe slowly and to relax your body fully as this will make the procedure more comfortable.

Although some women find the test uncomfortable or embarrassing the examination only takes five minutes and could save your life.

**Remember, you are in control and can say 'stop' at any time if you feel too uncomfortable**

## **What will happen?**

You will be asked to undress from the waist down (removing trousers and underwear), lie on your back on an examining couch, and bend your knees. Your doctor or nurse will gently

insert a tube called a speculum into your vagina to hold it open, so that they can see your cervix. The doctor or nurse will then gently brush cells from the cervix using a soft brush. The cells will be sent to a laboratory, where they will be examined under a microscope.

Some women prefer to wear a loose skirt that they can keep on during the test. Usually the person taking the test will offer you a sheet or blanket to cover yourself. If they don't, you can ask for one.

## **How long will the test take?**

The test takes just five minutes and you should be able to carry on as normal afterwards. Although some women find the test uncomfortable or embarrassing the examination only takes five minutes and could save your life.

**Can I bring a friend or an interpreter with me when I have the test?**

If you would like to bring a friend or arrange an interpreter, check when making your booking if this would be OK.

**You can ask for a female doctor or nurse when you book your appointment**

**Can the cervical screening test detect all changes?**

The cervical screening programme saves lives and is the best way to reduce your chance of cervical cancer. Like other screening tests it is not foolproof. It may miss some changes so it is important to go for a cervical screening test every time you are invited. You should report any symptoms such as an unusual discharge or bleeding, including bleeding after sex or between periods, to your doctor as soon as possible.



EVERY

3 years

A cervical screening test every 3 years will significantly reduce your risk of cervical cancer

### **How will I get my results?**

You will usually get your results in the post within 4 weeks. The results will be sent directly to your home address. If you wish these to be sent to another address, please let the person who carries out the test know.

The result will also be sent to whoever took your test, and your own GP will get a copy, even if you had your test done by someone else, for example, at a sexual health clinic. If you haven't received your result within 4–6 weeks, contact the person who carried out your test.

### **What will the results tell me?**

In most cases your letter will say 'no changes' and you will be invited to have another cervical screening test in three years as usual.

Sometimes the laboratory finds that there are not enough cells in the sample to examine. This is not unusual and you will be invited to repeat the test or to have further investigations.

**The results letter and enclosed leaflet will explain your result and what will happen next**

### **What will happen if changes are detected?**

Changes are detected in around 1 in every 10 women who have a test, so it is quite common. It is important to follow up changes and treat them if necessary.

Sometimes very small or 'minor' changes are detected. These can clear up on their own and do not require treatment. These changes will be monitored to check that they have cleared up. You will be invited to have another test in a few months' time.

If changes are detected which require further investigation you will be referred for examination to check whether the changes need to be monitored or treated.

### **What would happen if I did not have the test?**

You can choose whether to have a cervical screening test. If you are unsure about having the test, you can speak to your doctor or nurse, or visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening) for more information. It is important you understand the reasons for screening, and the possible outcomes if you choose not to have the cervical screening test.

Please bear in mind when making your decision that regular cervical screening is the best way to protect yourself against cervical cancer.

### **What happens to cervical screening test samples?**

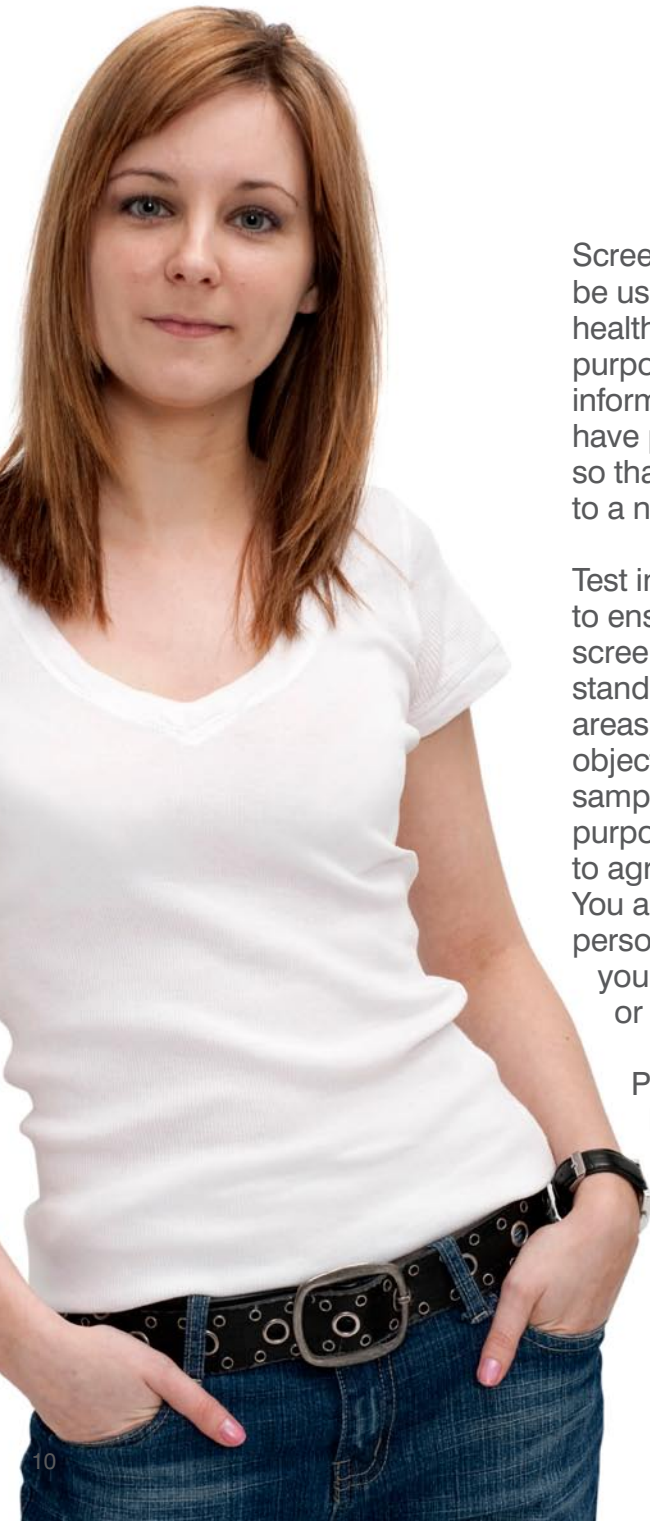
The laboratory that examines your cervical test sample will keep your sample for 10 years. They can compare samples taken from you at different times. You will be contacted if the results suggest your care should be changed in any way. Additionally, your sample may be subject to further testing, including HPV testing, so that the NHS can evaluate how well it is preventing cervical cancer.

### **How is information from cervical screening tests used?**

The Scottish Cervical Screening Programme keeps a record of your personal screening information including test results. Only authorised staff and appropriate healthcare professionals, such as your doctor, have access to this information. All NHS staff are bound by a strict code of confidentiality.

**5** MINUTES

Your cervical screening test will last 5 minutes. Five minutes that can save your life



Screening test information may be used for research, public health, education and training purposes. Any test samples and information used in this way will have personal details removed so that they cannot be linked to a named individual.

Test information is also used to ensure that the cervical screening service meets agreed standards, and it also identifies areas for improvement. You can object to the use of your test sample and information for this purpose and the NHS is obliged to agree, if it is possible to do so. You also have a legal right to see personal information held about you in written medical records or on computer.

Please contact the Data Protection Officer at your local NHS Board if you would like to know more about how your cervical screening test information may be used.

5,000  
LIVES SAVED

Cervical screening saves  
around 5,000 lives every  
year in the UK

## Contacts

Below is a list of agencies which may be able to provide you with support, information or advice:

### Lothian LGBT Helpline

0131 556 4049  
(Wednesday 12.30 – 7pm)

### LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing

0131 523 1100  
(Monday to Friday  
9am – 5pm)  
[www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)

### The Sappho Service

6 Sandyford Place,  
Sauchiehall Street,  
Glasgow G3 7NB  
0141 211 8130

### Stonewall Scotland

0131 557 3679  
[www.stonewall.org.uk/scotland](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/scotland)

### Strathclyde Gay and Lesbian Switchboard

0141 847 0447  
(Daily 7pm – 10pm)  
[www.sgls.co.uk](http://www.sgls.co.uk)

### Strathclyde Lesbian Line

0141 847 0547  
(Wednesday 7pm – 10pm)

### Diversity LGBT Switchboard Dundee

01382 202 620  
(Monday 7pm – 9pm)

**Put it on your list. Take the cervical  
screening test and reduce your risk  
of cervical cancer**

This publication is available online at [www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com) or telephone **0131 536 5500** with any queries.

## Chinese

您也可以登录 [www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com) 浏览本刊物，或拨打电话到 **0131 536 5500** 查询。

## Polish

Ta publikacja jest dostępna online na stronie [www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com) lub pod numerem telefonu **0131 536 5500**, gdzie można także zgłaszać wszelkie zapytania.

## Urdu

یہ اشاعت آن لائن [www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com) پر دستیاب ہے  
یا کسی سوالات کے لیے **0131 536 5500** پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔

We are happy to consider requests for other languages or formats. Please contact **0131 536 5500** or email [nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net)

### Want to know more?

Talk to your nurse or doctor, visit [www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening](http://www.nhs24.com/cervicalscreening) or phone **0800 22 44 88**

