

Cervical Smear Test - A Summary

The cervical smear test helps to **prevent** cancer. It does not detect cancer.

What is a cervical smear test?

- The cervix is the lower part of the uterus (the 'neck of the womb').
- The smear test checks your cervix for abnormal cells which **may** develop into cancer at some time in the future.

Who should have a cervical smear test?

All women aged 25 to 64. For women aged 25-49 it is usually done every three years. For women aged 50-64 it is usually done every five years. It may be advised for *some* women over the age of 64.

How is the smear test done?

- A doctor or nurse will gently open your vagina so they can see your cervix.
- They then use a wooden stick called a spatula, or a thin brush, to gently scrape off some cells from the surface of the cervix.
- The cells are sent away and looked at under a microscope to see if any are abnormal.

What are the possible results of the test?

- In about 9 in 10 smears, the result is normal.
- Sometimes the result says 'inadequate smear'. This means that no result can be given. This occurs because the cells could not be seen properly, or there were not enough cells scraped off. You will be asked to attend for a repeat smear.
- In about 1 in 10 smears, there is an abnormal result. This means that some changes to the cells are found. **These changes do not mean cancer in nearly all cases.**

A copy of the result is posted to you and your GP. This can take up to 6-8 weeks after the test.

What happens if I have an abnormal smear test?

- Your doctor will advise on what to do, depending on the type and degree of change.
- A repeat smear after 3-12 months is commonly advised. Often the changes will have gone on the repeat smear.
- If the changes do not go, or are more marked, then you will be offered referral for further assessment or treatment.
- Treatment is necessary in some cases. Abnormal cells can be removed by treatments such as freezing, or with a laser. This will stop cancer of the cervix from developing in the future.

Do I need to have a smear if I have had a hysterectomy?

This depends on the type of hysterectomy and what it was done for. Your doctor will advise. In general, if you had a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) for a reason not due to cancer, then you no longer need smears.