
What is a cervical smear test?

This test allows us to look closely at the cells from the neck of the womb (**cervix**). If cell changes are seen these can often disappear themselves. However you may need to be treated as some might become cancer.

Do you need to be tested?

This test is offered to all women aged between 20 and 60 (even if you have had the Human Papilloma Virus vaccine)

- ❖ We advise you to have it done if you have **ever** had sex
- ❖ If you have had your womb removed (**hysterectomy**) ask your doctor if you still need to have smears

You will be sent a letter inviting you to have your next test every 3 years

Please tell the reception staff at the health centre if you have never had this letter. The address they have for you may be not be correct.

How is the test taken?

We need to be able to examine the **Cervix** (the opening of the womb) and gently wipe or brush cells from it. You may find this uncomfortable. It shouldn't be painful.

- ❖ You will be asked to take your pants off and lie on the couch
- ❖ A small instrument known as a **speculum** will be put into your vagina (birth canal)
- ❖ This is gently opened up so that the cervix can be seen
- ❖ Cells are then lightly brushed from the cervix. The test is sent to a laboratory to be examined

Who carries out the test?

One of the practice nurses at your GP surgery usually does the test. They have been specially trained to take smears.

You can also have a smear taken at the local Sexual Health Clinic.

How will you get this result?

- ❖ You will be sent the result by post explaining it
- ❖ Check the person taking your smear has your **correct address**
- ❖ Results usually take about 4 weeks to come back. **If you haven't had your result back after 6 weeks** contact the health centre to ask about it.

In most cases the result is **negative** (normal)

- ❖ Your next smear will then be due in three years
- ❖ Sometimes the laboratory will ask for the test to be taken again. This is known as a **repeat smear**

Why take a repeat smear?

Reasons why you might need to have the test taken again:

- ❖ **There were not enough cells to be examined.** This is the most common reason
- ❖ **You have an infection.** This will be treated before another smear is taken
- ❖ **You have thinning of the vaginal wall.** This is common in older women. It makes the cells more difficult to examine. You may be given cream to help this
- ❖ **Changes in the cells have been seen.** This is known as an **abnormal smear**. Pre-cancerous cells are tissue cells in the body that are slightly abnormal and could develop into cancer if left untreated

A second test will then be taken in the same way as the first

- ❖ The changed cells may have gone naturally by the time of this second test
- ❖ If this happens you will be asked to have at least 2 more smear tests
- ❖ These will be taken sooner than usual, after six months or a year
- ❖ If these show normal results you can then go back to testing every three years

What if you still have abnormal cells?

You will be offered an outpatient appointment at the colposcopy clinic at the BGH. The colposcope is a microscope used to examine the cervix closely.

This lets the doctor see the area clearly and take a biopsy, a small piece of tissue, for further testing.

Abnormal cells can be cured

- ❖ Treatment will usually be given at an outpatient clinic
- ❖ Treatment does not affect your sex life or stop you having children

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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