

Treatment to prevent cancer

Dr Imtiaz-Umer explains “Having high-risk HPV along with cervical cell changes does not necessarily indicate cancer. If a colposcopy (to examine the cells in your cervix more closely) is recommended by the medical team, they will discuss it with you, as well as consider other tests and treatment of these abnormal cells.



Eliminating cervical cancer

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NHS England has committed to eliminate cervical cancer by 2040.

The HPV vaccine reduces your chance of getting HPV. Most types of HPV are harmless, but some types are linked to an increased risk of certain cancers, including cervical, mouth and some types of head and neck cancer. The vaccine is recommended for children aged 12 to 13 years old and people at higher risk from HPV.

Dr Imtiaz-Umer says: “Getting vaccinated for HPV and participating in cervical screening are essential steps to help eradicate cervical cancer. If you don’t understand any information given to you about cervical screening, please do contact your GP surgery and discuss your concerns with a member of the team.

“Please also ensure your GP has your accurate address. If you're registered as male but have a cervix, consult your GP practice to help make sure that invitations for both cervical and breast cancer screenings are sent to you. Lastly, as a GP, I want to emphasise that everyone in the UK is welcome to register with a GP.”



What you should know

Hopefully, you have heard of cervical screening, but do you know how it helps to prevent cervical cancer?

Latest figures from NHS England showed that over 3 million women and people with a cervix aged 25-64, were screened in 2023-2024, with the aim of preventing cancer.

During the screening, a small sample of cells are taken from the cervix, which is the opening to the womb, using a small brush. This is then checked for a specific virus called Human papillomavirus (HPV). If detected early, effective treatments are available to remove any abnormal cervical cells caused by the high-risk HPV infection, to prevent cancer.

Should I go for cervical screening?

“If you have a cervix, then cervical screening is for you,” says GP, Dr Shehla Imtiaz-Umer. “Please don’t let anything stop you attending. It takes a few minutes and could save your life.”



We are here for you

At the age of 25, Jenna received her first cervical screening. It showed she had HPV, a common group of viruses, along with borderline abnormal changes to cervical cells. She says: “This meant it was possible I would need another test in six months to ensure there wasn't anything worrying developing.”

Dr Imtiaz-Umer says, “The NHS is here for you and we have lots of tips to make your screening more comfortable. For example, you can ask for an appointment with a female clinician. If you find it uncomfortable, you can ask for a different sized speculum, which is a piece of equipment we use during screening to take the sample.”

Jenna says about her next cervical screening appointment: “I told the nurse that I was worried because my last test was such a bad experience, and I didn’t know if the HPV was still there. The nurse was lovely – she took her time, listened to me, and really went out of her way to look after me.”

If you have had a difficult screening experience, or have past trauma such as abuse or a difficult pregnancy, or you just feel scared about your screening, please ask for help before your appointment, or talk to a charity such as The Eve Appeal, the Caribbean and African Health Network (CAHN) or Safeena Muslim Cancer Support.



Your cervical screening results letter

Most people will get a results letter that says no further action is needed. High-risk HPV causes 99% of cervical cancers. If you don’t have high-risk HPV, your risk of cervical cancer is very low and you do not need any further tests. You will be invited for screening again in 3 or 5 years, depending on your age.

If high risk HPV is found in your sample, but there wasn’t any evidence of abnormal cell changes, you may need another cervical screening appointment in one year.

“If HPV is found and you have abnormal cell changes, you will be referred for a colposcopy. This is a simple procedure to look at your cervix more closely. A biopsy (small sample) of cells might be taken to test how much change has occurred in your cells.”

www.nhs.uk/cervicalcancer

