

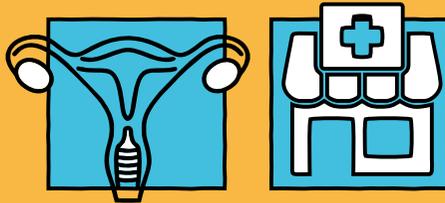
Groundswell

Out of homelessness

Your right to cervical screening:

information about what it's for,
how to get it and putting you in control

Important: cervical screening may also be known as a smear test



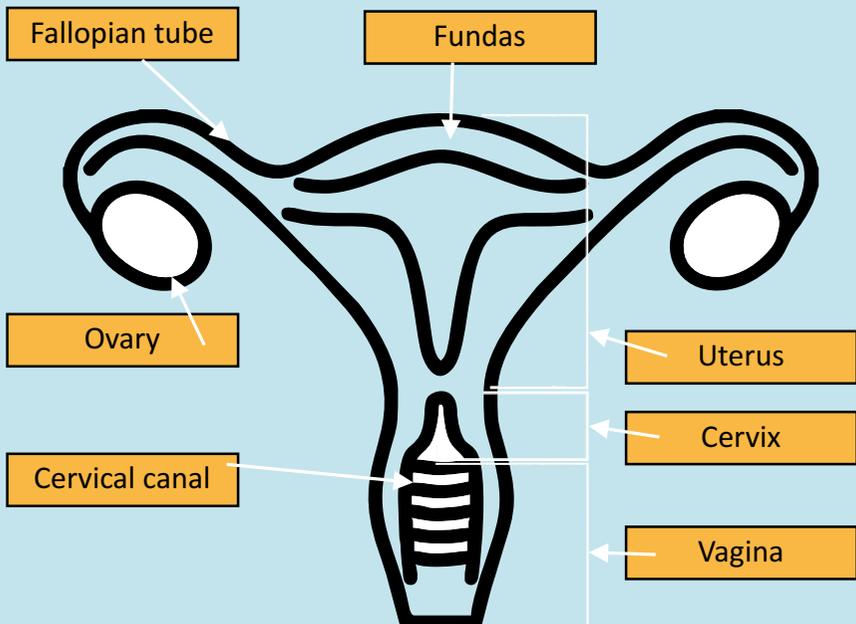
Sources: <https://www.jostrust.org.uk/>
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cervical-screening/>,

What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening is a free health check that looks for HPV or abnormal cells on your cervix.

Your cervix is a part of your body that joins the top of your vagina to your womb.

HPV is: Human Papillomavirus. HPV is a very common virus. In a small number of people, certain types of HPV develop into cervical cancer if not monitored or treated.



Who can get screened?

- All women and people with a cervix between the ages of 25 and 64 have the right to go for regular cervical screening.
- Depending on how old you are and the results, will determine how often you will need to be screened.

Age	When You're Invited
25 TO 49	Every 3 Years
50 TO 64	Every 5 Years

- Cervical screening is for people without symptoms. If you have symptoms such as vaginal discharge, vaginal bleeding, or pain, this needs to be investigated and treated, sometimes including a referral made by a GP. **If you have symptoms such as vaginal discharge, vaginal bleeding, or pain, this needs to be investigated and treated by a medical professional. Discuss this with a GP.**
- **It does not matter whether or not you are sexually active, if you fit this criteria you have the right to cervical screening.'**
- Trans men and non-binary people who have had a total hysterectomy to remove their cervix do not need cervical screening.
- Trans men and non-binary people who still have a cervix should have cervical screening.
- If you're a trans man registered with a GP as male, you will not receive automatic invitations. You can still have cervical screening. You'll need to ask your GP practice for an appointment.
- *In some cities there are clinics specialising in trans healthcare that offer cervical screening. Speak to your GP or support worker for more information.*

Why is cervical screening important?

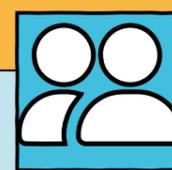
- Cervical screening is a universal preventative health offer for all women and people with a cervix.
- Regular cervical screening can help prevent the development of cervical cancer.
- You are at increased risk of getting cervical cancer if: you smoke, you have HIV or other sexually transmitted infections or if you became sexually active at an earlier age. You are also at increased risk if you are under the age of 45.
- Cervical screening is the most effective thing you can do to reduce your risk of developing cervical cancer as it picks up problems early, before it becomes cancer, and can be treated easily.



How do I access cervical screening?

Screening is free with the NHS: see sections below on how to access and what to expect.

- You access cervical screening through a GP or some nurse led primary care services.
- Some sexual health clinics can offer screening so ask if this is available at your local service.
- **Everyone has the right to see a GP. You do not need ID or a fixed address to register with a GP and your immigration status does not matter.**
- It's important that the GP has up to date contact details for you. This can be the number/address of a friend, relative, hostel or service that you trust.
- If you do not have access to a postal address let your GP know they should contact you by phone to book appointments.
- If you missed your last cervical screening, you do not need to wait for a letter to book an appointment, contact your GP.
- If you are not registered as female with your GP, you may not be automatically invited for cervical screening. If you are not registered as female but do have a cervix you are still eligible for cervical screening, contact your GP to discuss your options.



How to prepare for a cervical screening

Things to consider before your screening:

- You can request a longer appointment time.
- You can take a friend or support worker with you.
- When booking the appointment or at the start of an appointment, you can ask for a medical professional of a particular gender.
- You can request a chaperone.
- You can request a visit with the medical professional to discuss the screening in advance of the appointment.
- There are specialist services for people who have experienced sexual violence or abuse so speak to your GP for more information.

If you feel comfortable, it may be helpful to tell the medical professional if you:

- Are anxious or have experienced any sexual violence or other trauma which may make the cervical screening difficult for you.
- Have experienced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), scarring or any injury which may affect the test.
- Have a physical or mental health condition.
- Have had a bad experience with cervical screening before, let them know what they can do to make you feel more comfortable.

What will happen at the appointment?

- You can bring a friend or support worker to the appointment. You should be offered a chaperone, if you are not you have the right to ask the medical professional for one.
- You will have a private space to undress from the waist down.
- The medical professional will ask you to lie back on a couch with your knees bent and apart.
- You will have a clean sheet or couch paper to cover you.
- A plastic or metal tool (a speculum) will be gently put into your vagina. It opens so the medical professional can see your cervix.
- The medical professional will use a small, soft brush to take a sample of cells from your cervix.
- When the screening is over, the sample of cells is sent to a laboratory for testing.

This is an intimate procedure, whilst it does not hurt it can be uncomfortable or triggering for some people.

Here are some tips on how to feel more comfortable at your screening:

- Remember you are in control: you can ask questions or ask the medical professional to stop at any time. It may help to agree a word or hand signal, so the medical professional knows to stop immediately if you want them to.
- If the speculum is uncomfortable, ask for a smaller size, more lubrication or ask to insert it yourself.
- Wear a long t-shirt or hoodie which you will be able to keep on during the examination.
- Some people find it helpful to have a tissue to wipe themselves after the screening. You can ask the medical professional for a tissue or bring one yourself.
- Listen to some music, watch a video, or bring a book to help you relax.
- Arrange how you will travel to and from the appointment in advance.
- Ask a friend, support worker or someone else you trust to accompany you to the appointment. They could sit in the waiting room or meet you afterwards.

Remember it does not matter if you aren't wearing clean clothes or feeling fresh. The important thing is getting the test done to prevent more serious illness. The medical professionals do this daily - they have seen it all before.

The result of your screening:

- You will get a letter with your results which should arrive within 2 weeks but may take longer.
- If you don't have an address, tell your GP and the nurse, you may be asked to come to the GP to get your results.
- Alternatively, you can ask for the letter to be sent to your GP practice.
- It's important to keep your contact details up to date and let your GP know if you don't have a postal address.



Your results letter will explain what your results mean:

If HPV is not found in your sample – HPV negative, this means your risk of getting cervical cancer is very low and you'll be invited for screening again in 3 years if you are 25-49 and in 5 years if you are 50-64.

If HPV is found in your sample – HPV positive but no abnormal cells, you'll be invited for screening again in 1 year and again in 2 years if you still have HPV. If you still have HPV after 3 years you may need to have a colposcopy.

HPV positive with abnormal cells, you will be referred for a colposcopy.

A colposcopy is a simple procedure done in hospital to look further at your cervix. You can have a positive HPV result even if you haven't been sexually active or not had a new partner for many years.

Problems with the result

You might be told that you need a repeat test because yours couldn't be read properly. This is sometimes called having an inadequate sample. This could be because:

- There were not enough cells in the sample.
- You have an infection and it wasn't possible to see the cells clearly enough.
- You were having a period and there was too much blood to see the cells clearly.
- The cervix was inflamed and it wasn't possible to see the cells clearly enough.

In all these cases, the letter will ask you to go back and have another test. This is usually about 3 months later.

If you feel anxious while waiting for your results, it might help to talk to a friend or support worker. Most people get a clear result, but some need further tests.



**If you choose to take up your right to cervical screening
it's the most effective thing you can do to help reduce your risk of cervical cancer.**



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Everyone has the right to good health and to access healthcare. People experiencing homelessness face health inequalities, they are often excluded from information and services. That's why Groundswell produces accessible health guidance for people experiencing homelessness, so they can make informed decisions about their health.

All our health guides are created alongside people with experience of homelessness and reviewed by relevant professionals.