

# Cervical Cancer Screening



## **WHAT IS A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN?**

A Cervical Cancer Screen is a simple procedure in which a health care professional gently collects cells from the lower end of the womb (cervix) during an internal examination of the vagina. The cells are sent to the TML Pathology laboratory, where they are tested. In some cases, you may be able to take the sample for cervical screening yourself "self collect" – which will test for HPV from the vagina. Please discuss this with your healthcare provider if you are interested in this option.

## **WHY HAVE A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN?**

Cervical Cancer Screens are an easy way to detect early Human papillomavirus (HPV) and your best defence against cervical cancer. Cervical cancer screens have replaced Pap smears as the preferred testing method.

## **WHAT IS HPV AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

HPV is a common virus. It is an infection that can affect anyone who is, or has been, sexually active. Most infections are harmless and resolve in about a year. While most women with an HPV diagnosis will not be affected, HPV infection can lead to an increased risk of pre-cancer or cancer in a small number of cases.

HPV types can be divided into two groups:

- 1) Low risk types which may cause genital warts and minor changes; and
- 2) High risk types, which can possibly cause cervical cancer in some women.

Testing women for high risk HPV types helps identify the small percentage of women at risk of developing pre-cancerous changes and cancer. Type 16 and Type 18 are the 2 high risk types that cause 75% of cervical cancers.

*It is important to note that a positive HPV test does not mean you have cancer, it can just mean you have an increased risk of developing cancer*

If these changes are found and treated early, most cancers can be prevented.

Having cervical cancer screens on a timeframe recommended by your doctor has been shown to reduce the likelihood of developing cervical cancer.

### **HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HPV?**

Unlike other viral or bacterial infections, HPV does not cause you to feel unwell or experience irritation, discharge or bleeding. Most women with HPV changes do not realise they have the infection. HPV may be present for years before it causes changes in the cervical cells that are identified in a routine cervical cancer screen. HPV can be detected through a simple test for the high risk types linked with cervical pre-cancer and cancer.

### **HOW EFFECTIVE IS A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN?**

Having your cervical cancer screens as recommended greatly increases the chances of finding early pre-cancerous changes.

### **WHO NEEDS A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN?**

Women over the age of 25 are invited by the National Cancer Screening Register to participate in the national cervical screening program.

The cervical screening program is available to women between the ages of 25 and 74 years.

Please note: HPV vaccinated women still require cervical screening as the HPV vaccine does not protect against all the types of HPV that may cause cervical cancer.

Women of any age who have symptoms such as unusual bleeding, discharge or pain should see their health care professional immediately.

## HOW OFTEN WILL I HAVE TO HAVE A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN?

The frequency of your cervical cancer screening will depend upon your risk of developing cervical cancer. There are 3 risk categories. If your result shows that you are:

### **1. LOW RISK**

You will be invited to rescreen in 5 years as long as you have no other symptoms and have no evidence of HPV in your sample.

### **2. INTERMEDIATE RISK**

You will be invited to have another HPV test in 12 months if you have tested positive for one of the cancer-causing HPV Types (excluding Types 16 and 18).

### **3. HIGH RISK**

If you have tested positive for either or both HPV Types 16 and 18, you will be referred to a specialist for further investigation.

## HOW WILL I KNOW THAT I AM DUE FOR A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN?

The National Cancer Screening Register will send a reminder communication to inform you when you are due for your next cervical screen.

## HOW WILL A SAMPLE BE COLLECTED?

The process of collecting cells for the HPV test is simple. A health care professional will gently brush a small sample of cells from the lower end of the womb (cervix) during an internal examination of the vagina – in the same way a Pap smear was collected. Self collection for HPV testing is an option for many patients now. Please discuss this with your healthcare provider if you are interested.

The sample is then sent to the TML Pathology laboratory where it is tested. Your doctor will be notified of the results.

**Please note:** HPV testing is **NOT** performed on a blood sample.

## **HOW WILL I GET THE RESULTS?**

The results of your cervical cancer screen will be sent to your doctor who will communicate with you appropriately.

## **HOW IS HPV INFECTION TREATED?**

If only minor changes show in your cells and a high risk HPV type is not evident, then you are at a lower risk of progressing to a precancerous or cancerous change in your cervix. In this instance, your doctor may recommend a follow up protocol, rather than further treatment. Cervical lesions, caused by HPV can almost always be easily treated. Your doctor will be able to discuss effective treatment options with you.

Remember that cervical cancer is a rare condition. Advances in laboratory testing have led to the prevention of many cases; with procedures such as the HPV test playing a role in reducing the incidence of cervical cancer.

## **HOW MUCH WILL A CERVICAL CANCER SCREEN COST ME?**

Cervical screening requests that follow the national prescribed laboratory process will be bulk billed subject to Medicare guidelines and criteria.

If a request for Cervical Cancer Screening is different to the Medicare guidelines and criteria, an out-of-pocket fee may apply.

Please discuss this with your doctor.



ACCF  
comfort  
checklist



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CERVICAL CANCER  
FOUNDATION

TML Pathology is proud to support the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation's Comfort Checklist for cervical screening.

The ACCF 'Comfort Checklist' aims to empower women and increase the likelihood of cervical screening being perceived as a positive experience. It does this by including ways to overcome emotional, cultural and physical barriers to help improve screening adherence.

For more information please visit:  
[accf.org.au/comfort-checklist](http://accf.org.au/comfort-checklist)

**For further information, please see your doctor.**

To find your local collection centre visit  
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