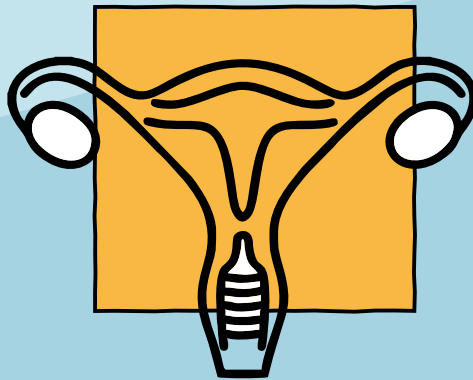


# Taking part in cervical screening





## Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet provides information for people experiencing homelessness across London on how to participate in cervical screening.

The information might also be helpful for key workers and/or service providers who support people experiencing homelessness to access healthcare services.

## What is cervical screening?

Screening is a way of identifying people without symptoms who may have an increased risk of a particular health issue. The NHS offers a range of screening tests which are **free**.

Cervical screening looks for changes in your cervix. Cervical screening uses a soft brush that picks up cells to check for a virus called **HPV (Human Papillomavirus)**. HPV is very common and mostly nothing to worry about.

You can get the virus from any kind of sex or sexual touching with another person.

If HPV is present, the cells will be looked at to see if they have started to become abnormal. This is an important process in reducing your risk of getting cervical cancer.



A cervical screen can save your life



By attending regular cervical screening, 83% of cervical cancer deaths can be prevented.



For every 100 people who have cervical screening, only 4 in 100 people will be invited for further tests.

## Who is cervical screening for?

Your invitation to the cervical screening programme (**formerly called a 'smear test'**) will depend on your age and gender registered at your GP surgery, and whether you have a cervix. The cervix is the opening to your womb from your vagina.

- If you're a cis-gender woman, a trans man, or non-binary assigned female at birth, and you're registered with a GP as female, you'll receive invitations for cervical screening.
- If you're a trans man registered with a GP as male, you will not receive automatic invitations. You should still have cervical screening. You'll need to ask your GP surgery for an appointment.

You do not need cervical screening if:

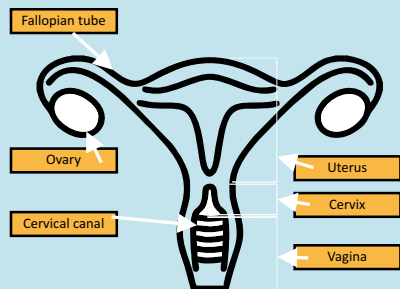
- You're a trans woman or non-binary person assigned male at birth, as you do not have a cervix.
- You're assigned female at birth, a trans man or non-binary and you've had a total hysterectomy to remove your cervix.

All women and people with a cervix will be invited every 3 years between the ages of 25-49 and every 5 years between the ages of 50-64. You will be invited up to 6 months before you turn 25 and continue to receive invitations after age 64 only if your last test is abnormal.

It doesn't matter if you have missed your screening invitations. If you are between 25 and 64 years, you can speak to your GP to get your cervical screen. In some areas your sexual health services or genitourinary medicine (GUM) services might provide cervical screening. Contact the relevant clinic to obtain further information.

Cervical screening is not recommended if you're under 25.

## How does cervical screening work?



- A cervical screen is usually done by a female nurse or doctor, but if you prefer, you can request a specific gendered health professional when booking your appointment.
- You will have a private space to undress from the waist down.
- When you're ready, you'll lie on a bed with your knees bent and apart. You will have a clean sheet to cover you.
- A speculum with lubricant will be gently put into your vagina. This opens so the health professional can see your cervix. The healthcare professional will use the right size speculum for you to view your cervix clearly.
- They will use a small, soft brush to take a sample of cells.
- The test is quick and usually not painful but can be uncomfortable for a short period of time.



## How does cervical screening work? Continued ...

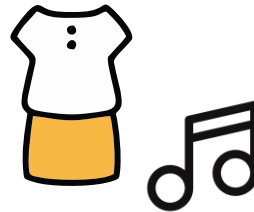
If you feel any discomfort or pain during the procedure, you can ask the health professional to help put you at ease by:

- Pausing for a moment to make it more comfortable for you.
- Helping you take slow, deep breaths to help you and your pelvic muscles relax.
- Applying a small amount of lubricant to the side of the speculum.
- Letting you insert the speculum yourself.

### Top Tips



- Wear clothing that makes it easy to remove lower items and underwear (e.g., skirt or dress).
- Listen to music during your appointment to help you relax.
- If you are lying on your back, you could tilt the hips by putting your hands underneath your bottom.
- You can ask to lie on your left-hand side with your knees bent if lying on your back is more difficult.
- It's best to book an appointment for a time when you're not having a period. Also, try to avoid the two days before or after you bleed (if you do not have periods, you can book any time).



## Why should I do it?

Finding out about a problem early can mean that treatment is more effective.



Finding out you have a health problem, or an increased chance of a health problem can help you make better informed decisions about your health.

Deciding whether or not to have a screening test is a personal choice and one which only you can make.



It does not matter what your sexuality is or whether you are sexually active or not.



You can discuss any aspect of the screening test with a health professional and decide whether or not it is right for you.

# How can I take part in cervical screening?

**You need to be registered with a GP surgery to access a screening.** To do this, you or a trusted person can download the family doctor services registration form (GMS1), fill this out by hand, and hand it into the GP surgery:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gms1>.



## Remember

Everyone has the right to access healthcare. You do not need ID or a fixed address to register with the GP and your immigration status does not matter.

**It is important that the GP has accurate information for you, in particular:**

- **Your name**
- **Your date of birth**
- **Your gender**
- **Your contact details e.g. mobile number and an agreed address for your health letters to go to, e.g. care of (c/o) address.**



Your screening invitation will be a letter sent to the address you provide to your GP surgery and will ask you to book an appointment.



If you do not wish to be invited for cervical screening, contact your GP surgery or ask for help to fill out the opt out online form:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opting-out-of-the-nhs-population-screening-programmes/opting-out-of-screening>



If you do book an appointment, a text reminder will be sent to the mobile number your GP surgery has on record to remind you of your upcoming appointment.

## Managing my appointment

Ask for an appointment time at your GP surgery or sexual health service/GUM clinic (if they provide cervical screening) based on when you are able to attend (e.g., if you struggle to sleep, an early morning appointment may be a challenge).



If you have found your appointments difficult in the past, or are feeling very nervous, you can ask for a double appointment.

If you struggle to remember appointments, you could:

- ask a friend, or support worker to remind you
- set an alarm or reminder on your phone



Plan your route in advance and allow time so you don't feel rushed. Speak to a local support service or key worker if you need help to attend – they may be able to help.

Ask a trusted friend or support worker to either attend the appointment with you or to be available to chat after. If you feel anxious, it can be a good distraction knowing someone can talk to you while you wait.



Visit the practice or sexual health service/GUM clinic if you have booked your appointment there beforehand so you are familiar with the setting.

Make an appointment with the nurse just to discuss the screening procedure.

Remember the health professionals keep anything you say confidential. It may help to share any physical or mental health challenges or disabilities so they can make changes, to make you feel more comfortable, but this is your choice.



## Helping you decide

**No screening test is 100% reliable.** There are pros and cons to consider before taking part.

- An HPV infection or abnormal cells can sometimes be missed.
- Abnormal cells can develop and turn into cancer in between screening tests, if regular three-yearly or five-yearly screening is missed.
- There is a small chance that a result says abnormal cells are found when the cervix is normal.
- If screening does not find abnormal cells this does not guarantee that you do not have them, or that they will never develop in the future.

## Remember

- Screening for STI's (sexually transmitted infections) such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and syphilis **are not** the same as a cervical screen but can also be requested.
- HPV is **not** the same as HIV. HPV can be found in anyone and usually goes away over time. However, a cervical screen can help detect the virus and check for abnormal cells earlier.

This guide and the invitations sent to you by the cervical screening programme give you information to decide whether or not you want to be screened – **it is your choice.**

## When you should go see your doctor

Symptoms of cervical cancer include:



vaginal bleeding that's unusual for you – including bleeding during or after sex, between your periods or after the menopause, or having heavier periods than usual



changes to your vaginal discharge



pain during sex



pain in your lower back, between your hip bones (pelvis), or in your lower tummy

If you have another condition like fibroids or endometriosis, you may get symptoms like these regularly. If you have any of these changes, don't wait for your next cervical screening appointment. See your GP as soon as possible. Your GP can examine you and refer you to a gynaecology clinic if necessary. Usually, these symptoms will not mean you have cancer. But if you are found to have cancer, getting it diagnosed and treated early can mean you are more likely to survive.

## What other information do I need to know?



- ✓ If you change your name, address or phone number, let the GP surgery know.
- ✓ When updating your address, you can provide contact information of your key worker as a second contact.
- ✓ If you move to a new location, you can register with a different GP surgery.
- ✓ If you do not have a fixed address, you can ask your GP surgery to update your records with their address.

[An easy read guide to cervical screening](#)

[56 Dean Street](#) is a sexual health clinic in Soho, specialising in reducing infections and promoting sexual wellbeing amongst the LGBTQI+ community. If you are 25+ with a cervix, you can pre-book a **free** cervical screening appointment at their Tuesday evening clinic on **020 3315 5656**.

[My Body Back Project](#) offers cervical screening, contraceptive care, STI testing and maternity care for people who have experienced sexual violence.



*As a young adult I was not encouraged to seek any healthcare, nor did I register myself to a GP. However, by the time I turned 25, despite my unhealthy relationship with self-medicating, I was in a supportive relationship. My partner at that time was why I engaged with my first cervical screening despite my lack of self-care and value. I recall her telling me '5 minutes in the GP is better than years of cancer treatment should I put it off and risk any abnormalities not being found at an early stage'. Whilst I do find it an uncomfortable check-up, I haven't missed a screening. For me a strong support network is important to accessing healthcare services.*

*Ashleigh, 30 - Haringey*



**Scan the QR code for more information on  
cervical screening**

### **Acknowledgements**

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Image credit

Page 3: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-easy-read-guide>

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