

SMEARS

A woman's best protection against developing cervical cancer is having regular cervical smear tests.

A cervical smear test is a screening test to find abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. Having regular smear tests can reduce a woman's risk of developing cervical cancer by 90%. Changes to cells in the cervix happen very slowly – so by having regular smears any abnormal cells will be found and treated long before they develop into cancer.

The National Cervical Screening Programme recommends that women have a cervical smear test every 3 years. Women who have previously had abnormal smears may need to have them more often – if you're unsure, ask your doctor. In the next few years the interval between smears will be extended to 5 yearly with routine HPV testing.

All women who have ever been sexually active should have regular cervical smear tests from the time they turn 20 until they turn 70.

Your Silverstream Health Centre doctor or nurse can perform your cervical smear test. The cost of a smear test is similar to the cost of seeing a doctor or nurse.

The cervical smear test

This is a screening test for well women with no unusual symptoms.

You will be asked to lie on your side or your back with your knees bent up. The lower part of your body will be covered with a sheet. The smear taker inserts a speculum into the vagina and visualises the cervix and interior walls of the vagina. A sample of cells are taken with a small broom or brush and placed in a solution and sent to the laboratory for testing. This process will only take a few minutes.

Some women may find the test uncomfortable, but it does not usually hurt. If you are embarrassed or nervous, tell your smear taker how you feel. You can take a support person with you if you wish. It is best not to have the test during your period.

Getting your results

All results are reported to patients. If they are normal you are put on recall for your next smear at the interval recommended by the laboratory.

If the results are abnormal the smear taker (doctor or nurse) will discuss this with you and organise appropriate follow up. This could be a repeat smear at an earlier interval or a referral for further examination to either a private or public gynaecologist.

Often these changes will return to normal on their own. In a small number of cases, abnormal cells can develop into cervical cancer if they are not treated.

More information

For more information, visit the Ministry of Health Time to Screen website [here](#).