

Can I have cervical screening when I am pregnant?

If you are due your routine cervical screening test and you are pregnant, this should be put back until after your baby is born. Usually, it is advisable to wait until at least 12 weeks after your baby is born. This gives the cervix a chance to recover from pregnancy and childbirth. Tests performed earlier are more likely to be inadequate.

Can I have my cervical screening test when I am having my period?

It is best to have your cervical screening test when you are not having your period (menstruating). Ideally, the test is best performed mid-cycle. If you are bleeding heavily, there may be too much blood and mucus on the brush and too few cells from the cervix will be removed.



Dr Wakeford & Partners

Poplar Grove Practice
Meadow Way, Aylesbury
Bucks HP20 1XB

www.poplar-grove.nhs.uk

E-mail: poplar.grove@nhs.net

Opening Times

Mon-Thurs: 0730 - 1930

Friday: 0730 - 1830

Tel: 01296 468580

Fax: 01296 398771

Over 75s Team: 01296 468589

Prescription queries: 01296 468585

Lines open daily between: 0800 - 1230 and
1400 - 1830



POPLAR GROVE
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Patient Information Leaflet

Cervical Screening (Smear Test)

www.poplar-grove.nhs.uk

E-mail: poplar.grove@nhs.net

Tel: 01296 468580



Cervical Screening (Cervical Smear Test)

Women are routinely invited to have cervical screening tests (also called smear tests). The tests are done to prevent cervical cancer, not to diagnose cancer. During each test some cells are removed from the neck of the womb (cervix), with a plastic brush. The cells are examined under a microscope to look for early changes that, if ignored and not treated, could develop into cancer of the cervix. You are very unlikely to develop cervical cancer if you have regular cervical screening tests at the times advised by your doctor. If the test shows any abnormality, you will have treatment to stop you ever getting cancer of the cervix. So, an abnormal test does not mean you have cancer. It means you should have some treatment to stop you getting cancer.

What is a cervical screening test and how is it done?

The cervix is the lowest part of the womb (uterus). It is often called the neck of the womb. It is inside a woman's vagina. If you were to put a clean finger into your vagina as far as it will go, you might be able to feel your cervix deep inside.

You will be asked to remove your clothing from the waist down. If you wear a loose skirt, you may only need to remove your knickers. You will be asked to lie on your back on the examination couch. You should bend your knees, put your ankles together, and let your knees fall open. A doctor or nurse will put an instrument called a speculum into your vagina. The speculum is put in while it is shut. The doctor or nurse then gently opens it. This opens the vagina and allows the cervix to be seen (at the top of the vagina).

The doctor or nurse then uses a thin plastic stick with a small brush at the end to gently scrape some cells from the surface of the

cervix. The cells that are obtained on the brush are sent away to be examined in the laboratory. Cervical screening tests are not painful, although some women find the speculum uncomfortable. It generally helps if you can relax - this makes the experience better for you and easier for the person taking the sample. The newer disposable plastic specula are also a lot less cold than the older metal ones!

Why are cervical screening tests advised?

Cervical cancer is a disease that can often be prevented. Early changes can be detected in the neck of the womb (cervix), which indicate that cancer may develop. Since screening started, the numbers of cases of cervical cancer have dramatically dropped, and so have the number of women dying from it. Cancer of the cervix is now only the seventeenth most common cancer in women in the UK, whereas across the world it is the third or fourth most common cancer. This is because of the screening programme. It is one of the few types of cancer which can be detected and stopped before it ever begins.

In most women the cells that are taken are found to be normal. Abnormal cells are found in some women. An abnormal result does not mean cancer in the vast majority of cases. Abnormal cells indicate that cancer may develop sometime in the future. About 6 women in 100 will have an abnormal result that requires further testing or treatment. Most of these changes will not lead to cervical cancer. Treatment can be given to prevent cancer from developing in women with abnormal cells.

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme invites all women for regular tests automatically. You need to be registered with a GP, as this is how the programme obtains your name. It is therefore

important that your GP has correct address details for you.

A computer system is used. Your record on the computer is updated when you have a test so it knows when your next one is due. You should receive a letter asking you to make an appointment to have a test when it is due. Computerised recall systems are good - but not fool-proof. Contact your GP if you think you should have had a cervical screening test but have not yet received an invitation to have one.

Cervical screening is a free service on the NHS.

First invitation for screening in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is at age 25.

Routine recall (repeat screening test):

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: three-yearly tests from age 25 to age 49. Five-yearly tests from age 50 to 64. Screening stops at age 65.

Women over 65 years of age should be screened if:

They have not had a cervical screening test since the age of 50.

A recent cervical screening test has been abnormal.

Cervical screening does not stop simply due to age until a woman with a previously abnormal cervical screening test has had three negative results.

Where do I go for a cervical screening test?

Most women have the test at their GP surgery. It is usually done by the practice nurse. You can have it done at a family planning clinic if you prefer. A copy of the result is usually sent to you, your GP and the health authority. This takes about two weeks. Ask at your GP surgery for the result of the test if you do not receive it.