

Understanding cervical screening results

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screen**

National
Cervical
Screening
Programme

Cervical screening results

A cervical screening test shows if there are changes in the cells on the surface of the cervix. Most results are normal, but some will show abnormal changes. 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.

Cervical cancer and human papillomavirus

- Cervical cancer is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is spread by sexual activity and affects almost all people at some point in their lives.
- There are many types of HPV. Most HPV infections will clear up by themselves.
- Only a few types of HPV will lead to abnormal cells that could progress to cancer.
- Cervical cancer usually takes many years to develop. Abnormal cells can be found and treated to stop them from becoming cancer.



HPV (cervical cancer) vaccine

Women who have received the HPV vaccine must continue with cervical screening. This is because it is still possible for abnormal changes to develop, even though it is a lot less likely after vaccination.

How often should I have cervical screening?

Regular cervical screening every three years is important to identify cell changes and prevent cervical cancer from developing.

How accurate is cervical screening?

Cervical screening, like all screening, is not 100% accurate and some women will still develop cervical cancer despite regular screening. While the risk of cervical cancer can be reduced, it cannot be eliminated by screening. Other tests, eg, testing for HPV may be used to help decide when treatment is necessary.

*Ma te mōhio ka ora
Knowledge improves
health and well-being*

What the different results mean

Normal Results

No atypical or abnormal changes were detected.

Unsatisfactory results

Unsatisfactory results mean that the test could not be read at the laboratory because there were not enough cells in the sample, or blood or mucus hid most of the cells. In this case, you will need to have another test within three months.

Inflammation or infection

Occasionally your test result may show that inflammation or infection is present. Discuss this with your health provider. Often no treatment is required.

Atypical cells

These changes are borderline between normal and abnormal. They are called atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance (ASC-US). Changes often clear up before your next test.

Mild (low-grade) changes (LSIL)

Mildly abnormal cells are called low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesions (LSIL). This means there are changes in the surface cells of the cervix. LSIL is the lowest grade of change.



If you have atypical or mild (low-grade) changes, your health provider may advise you to have another cervical screening test in 6-12 months. Quite often, the next result will be normal. You may be referred to see a specialist (colposcopist).

If you are over 30 years it will be recommended that you have an HPV test. If HPV is detected you will be referred for colposcopy.

Moderate to severe (high-grade) changes (HSIL)

High-grade changes are more developed changes called high-grade squamous intraepithelial lesions (HSIL). This doesn't mean cancer (most women will have cell changes that can be successfully treated), but you'll need another check called a colposcopy. When you have this examination the colposcopist may discuss HPV testing with you.

Colposcopy

Colposcopy is an examination of the cervix, using a magnifying lens called a colposcope.

The colposcope looks like a pair of binoculars on a stand. It magnifies your cervix and vagina so that any abnormal areas can be seen. The examination may include taking a small piece of tissue (a biopsy). The biopsy takes only a couple of seconds and may be a bit uncomfortable.

The colposcopist will discuss the result of your colposcopy with you at the end of the examination and will tell you when your biopsy results will be available.

Treatment

The colposcopist may recommend treatment to remove the abnormal cells. The type of treatment will depend on the type of abnormality and where it is on your cervix. Many abnormalities can be treated under a local anaesthetic, either in the colposcopy clinic or in day surgery. Your colposcopist will discuss the options with you. They will also be able to explain the various types of treatment. Early treatment of abnormal cells is almost 100 percent successful in preventing cancer.

The National Cervical Screening Programme

The programme aims to prevent cervical cancer. All women who have cervical screening are part of the programme unless they say that they do not want to be.

The benefits of recording cervical screening information include:

- ready availability of records to you, your health provider and the laboratory analysing your tests

- automatic reminder letters if you are overdue for cervical screening test
- checks to ensure the right follow-up after an abnormal screening test
- planning for the needs of different ethnic groups.

The information collected by the programme is stored on a computer system called the NCSP Register, which is managed by the Ministry of Health.

Withdrawing from the programme

Any woman can withdraw from the programme at any time by filling in a form or by writing to the programme. When you withdraw, any cervical screening tests recorded on the register will be deleted and future tests are not recorded.



An Important Message

See your doctor if you have:

- bleeding or spotting between menstrual periods
- bleeding or spotting after sexual intercourse
- bleeding or spotting after your menstrual periods have stopped (after menopause)
- persistent pain in your pelvis
- pain during sexual intercourse
- unusual or persistent discharge from the vagina. The discharge might be smelly, have changed colour from white to pink, brown, or green, or be streaked with blood.

These symptoms can happen for several reasons and rarely mean that you have cervical cancer. However, they should be checked by your doctor.

Further information

Visit our website: **www.timetoscreen.nz**

View this pamphlet and other health education resources at **www.healthed.govt.nz**

Contact:

- the National Cervical Screening Programme, freephone 0800 729 729
- your doctor or practice nurse
- community health centres, eg Māori health centres, Pacific health centres or women's health centres
- your local Family Planning clinic
- your local Cancer Society.

If you change your address, please advise your health provider and the National Cervical Screening Programme, freephone **0800 729 729** or email info@ncspregister.health.nz

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National
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TE HIRINGA HAUORA

