

# Smear Test

## What Is A Cervical Smear (Cervical Screening) Test?

Cervical screening, commonly known as a cervical smear test, is a vital health check for women and people with a cervix, typically offered between the ages of 25 and 64. This test is not designed to detect cancer itself but to identify abnormal cells on the cervix that, if left untreated, could develop into cervical cancer. Early detection and treatment of these abnormalities are essential, as they can prevent the progression to cancer. Cervical screening can prevent around 75% of cervical cancers, making regular smear tests an essential part of maintaining women's health and well-being. At Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic, we are committed to providing comprehensive care to ensure your long-term health.

## Who Should Get A Smear Test?

The UK NHS cervical screening programme invites women aged 25 to 64 for regular smear tests. The frequency of the tests depends on your age:

- 25 to 49 years: Every three years
- 50 to 64 years: Every five years
- Over 65: Only if you have recently had abnormal results or haven't been screened since age 50.

Women under 25 are not usually invited for screening as the incidence of cervical cancer is low, and the screening may detect changes in the cervix that would resolve without treatment.

## What Happens During A Smear Test?

Cervical screening is a quick and straightforward procedure that usually takes around 5-10 minutes. It might be a bit uncomfortable, but it shouldn't be painful. Here's what to expect:

- **Preparation:** You may be asked to undress from the waist down, so it's advisable to wear a skirt or dress for convenience. You'll be given a privacy sheet to cover yourself.
- **Positioning:** You will lie down on your back, usually on an examination couch, with your knees bent and your feet placed together.
- **Speculum insertion:** Your gynaecologist will gently insert a speculum into your vagina. This instrument helps to open the vaginal walls, allowing access to the cervix.
- **Sample collection:** Using a small, soft brush, your gynaecologist will take a sample of cells from the surface of your cervix. This may feel slightly uncomfortable but should not be painful.
- **Completion:** The sample is then sent to a laboratory for analysis, where it will be checked for abnormal cells and the presence of high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV).
- **Results:** We will contact you with your results within 2 weeks. The results will indicate whether your cells are normal, abnormal, or if further testing is needed.

## Preparing For Your Smear Test

To ensure the most accurate results, consider the following before your test:

- **Timing:** Try to schedule your test for a time when you're not on your period.
- **Avoid intercourse, vaginal medications, or creams for 24 hours before the test.**

## Understanding Hpv And Its Role In Cervical Screening

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that is linked to the development of cervical cancer. Most sexually active people will contract HPV at some point, but in most cases, the immune system clears the virus naturally without causing harm. However, certain high-risk types of HPV can cause abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix, which may develop into cancer over time if not treated.

Cervical screening in the UK now includes HPV primary screening, where the initial test checks for the presence of high-risk HPV. If high-risk HPV is found, the same sample will be checked for abnormal cells. If no HPV is detected, you will be invited for your next routine screening as usual.

## What Do The Results Mean?

We will contact you with your results, usually within 2 weeks. There are three possible outcomes:

- **Normal:** No abnormal cells were found, and you don't need another test until your next scheduled screening.
- **Inadequate:** The test sample couldn't be read, and you'll need to repeat the test.
- **Abnormal:** Changes in the cells were detected, which doesn't mean you have cancer, but you may need further testing.

## What Happens If Abnormal Cells Are Found?

If your test results show abnormal cells, it does not mean you have cancer. It means that some of your cells are not normal and may need treatment to prevent them from becoming cancerous in the future. Depending on the severity of the abnormalities, you may be referred for a colposcopy, a more detailed examination of the cervix, or you may need to repeat the screening test after some time.

## Benefits Of Cervical Screening

- **Early detection:** Identifies changes in cervical cells before they become cancerous, allowing for early treatment.
- **Cancer prevention:** Reduces the risk of developing cervical cancer by treating abnormal cells early.
- **Peace of mind:** Regular screening provides reassurance that your cervical health is being monitored.

## Risks And Considerations

The smear test is very safe, but like all medical procedures, it carries some risks:

- **False positives:** The test may indicate abnormal cells when there are none, leading to unnecessary worry or additional procedures.
- **False negatives:** Rarely, the test may miss abnormal cells, but regular screening reduces this risk.

It's also important to note that the smear test is not a test for cancer but a preventative measure to find changes that could potentially lead to cancer.

## What If I'm Worried About Having A Smear Test?

It's normal to feel anxious about cervical screening, but our experienced team at Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic is here to support you. We can discuss any concerns you have and guide you through the process to make it as comfortable as possible. Remember, cervical screening is a proactive step in protecting your health.

## Why Choose Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic?

At Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic, we understand the importance of cervical screening in maintaining your gynaecological health. Regular smear tests are essential for early detection and prevention of cervical cancer. Our experienced team provides you with a comfortable and supportive environment during your screening, using the latest technology to ensure accurate results and a stress-free experience. By choosing us, you benefit from personalised care tailored to your needs, ensuring that you receive the best possible care throughout your screening and follow-up process.

## Contact Us

For more information or to schedule your smear test, contact Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic today. Our dedicated team is here to support you every step of the way, ensuring your cervical health is in expert hands. Don't wait – book your appointment now for peace of mind and exceptional care.