



# Cervical Screening

What Pacific women  
need to know



To avoid cervical cancer and to stay well, Pacific women aged from 20 until they turn 70 need to have smear tests every three years. The smear tests look for cell changes in the cervix. Any abnormal cells are treated to stop them from becoming cancer.



## What causes cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called human papillomavirus or HPV, which is sexually transmitted.

There are many types of HPV, but only a few will cause cell changes in the cervix. These changes can return to normal or they may later become cancer if they are not treated.

HPV affects about 80% of sexually active women at some point in their lives. Most HPV infections will clear up by themselves.

## What are my chances of getting cervical cancer?

If you have a smear test every three years, you will reduce your risk of getting cervical cancer by 90%.

## How good is the smear test?

Having regular cervical smear tests could save your life. However, like many screening tests, the cervical smear test is not perfect.

Sometimes a result may show abnormal cells when in fact they are normal (a false positive result).

Occasionally, cell changes are missed and a normal result is given (a false negative result).

This is why it is important to have regular smear tests every three years.



## Having the smear test

Having a smear only takes a few minutes. Some women find it a little uncomfortable, but it does not hurt.

A few cells will be collected from your cervix (the neck of the womb) and placed in a liquid solution that preserves the cells for testing. The test checks for any cell changes. Any abnormal cells will be treated to prevent cancer developing.

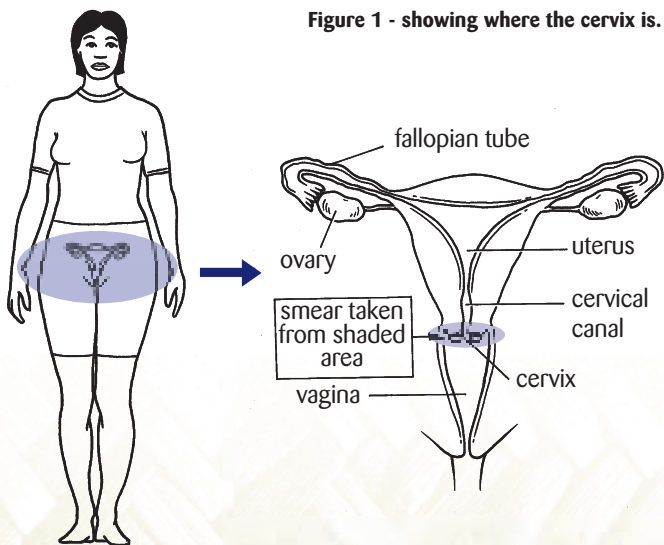
In some situations, women having a cervical smear test will also be offered an HPV test – which tests for the virus that may lead to cervical cancer. The HPV test is performed on the same sample as the smear test, so there is no need to have a second test.

## HPV (cervical cancer vaccine)

Women who have received the HPV vaccine must continue to have cervical smear tests.



**Figure 1 - showing where the cervix is.**





## About your results

Most women will have normal results.

Some women may be asked to go back for another test if there were not enough cells to look at.

If you have an abnormal result, you may be called back for other tests. An abnormal result hardly ever means cancer.

Your results will be sent to the National Cervical Screening Register to assist in recalling you for your next smear.

## How much will the test cost?

You may be charged your doctor's or nurse's usual fee. Some community or primary health organisations offer a free or low-cost service.

## Who does the tests?

- 🌀 Your GP – there are many female GPs who provide this service
- 🌀 Practice nurses
- 🌀 Pacific health services
- 🌀 Your local cervical screening programme
- 🌀 Family Planning centres and sexual health services.

## Important

If you have any unusual bleeding, pain or discharge from your vagina, see your doctor or nurse. These symptoms do not usually mean cervical cancer, but they should be checked.



Women with special needs or disabilities  
are welcome to be part of the  
National Cervical Screening Programme.

**Freephone 0800 729 729**  
to discuss any special needs.



## For further information ...

- 🌀 Contact the National Cervical Screening Programme or visit the website: [www.cervicalscreening.govt.nz](http://www.cervicalscreening.govt.nz)
- 🌀 The National Cervical Screening Programme also has the following resources:
  - 🌀 Cervical Smear Tests: What women need to know, HE1256
  - 🌀 Prevention of Cervical Cancer: A Guide for Women in New Zealand, HE1328
  - 🌀 Understanding cervical smear test results, HE4598
  - 🌀 Colposcopy: Information for women who have abnormal cervical smear results, HE1202.

If you change your address, please  
advise your smear taker and the  
National Cervical Screening Programme  
**Freephone 0800 729 729**