

NHS Cervical Screening Programme

HPV testing for women with a cervical screening result of borderline or mild dyskaryosis

Information for women

What is HPV?

HPV stands for Human Papilloma Virus.

HPV is a very common infection of the cervix. Most women get the virus at some time in their life. In most cases it does not need treatment and the body will clear it on its own.

There are lots of types of HPV and most are harmless. Some types can cause cervical abnormalities. These types are known as 'high risk' HPV types. Often, cervical abnormalities clear up when the virus clears. In some women the virus persists and these women are at greater risk of developing cervical abnormalities (CIN) which may require treatment.

How do people get HPV?

HPV is a very common infection amongst people who have ever been sexually active. As the virus shows no symptoms it is therefore possible that:

The person may have had the infection for many years without knowing about it.

A partner may have been infected many years ago and again not know.

Why will I be tested?

HPV tests will be carried out on samples from women whose screening result shows borderline or mild dyskaryosis for the first time. Women attending for early repeat screening due to a previous abnormality will not be HPV tested.

Women with borderline or mild dyskaryosis have only a 15-20% chance of having a significant abnormality needing treatment. The HPV test is important because it is effective at identifying women who may need treatment.

A previous NHS pilot study demonstrated that HPV testing can avoid unnecessary repeat screening, and if there is an abnormality which needs treatment it is detected quickly.

How is the test done?

The test is done using the sample of cells taken during your screening test so there is no need for you to come back for a second test. Samples are looked at in a laboratory and your result will be sent to you in writing.

What happens if I've got HPV?

If HPV is found in your sample you will be invited to go for colposcopy. Colposcopy is a way of looking closely at the cervix to see whether you need any treatment. If you need treatment you will usually be seen in an outpatients clinic which means that you will not need to stay overnight. If you would like more information about colposcopy you can talk to your GP, sample (smear) taker or local health clinic. You can also read our leaflet 'Cervical Screening – The Colposcopy Examination'.

Where can I find out more about HPV?

If you would like more information about HPV testing or anything else mentioned in this factsheet you can talk to your practice nurse, or visit the NHS Cancer Screening Programmes website at www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk