

Finding cervical cancer early

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Cancer of the cervix is one of the most preventable of all cancers. A Cervical Screening Test can detect the presence of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and find early changes to the cells long before cancer of the cervix develops.

Research indicates that the new Cervical Screening Test is expected to further reduce cervical cancer incidence and mortality by at least 20%.

Cancer Council recommends:

- all women aged 25–74 who have ever been sexually active should have a Cervical Screening Test every five years, even if they are no longer having sex
- screening should commence at 25 years of age or two years after your last Pap Smear
- boys and girls aged 12 and 13 years be immunised against Human Papilloma Virus.

Early detection of cervical cancer

Sometimes the cells of the cervix start to change without you having any symptoms. The abnormal cells can be found and treated before they turn into cancer. A Cervical Screening Test can detect the presence of HPV and early cell changes.

What is a Cervical Screening Test?

The new Cervical Screening Test will detect cancer-causing HPV types in a sample of cells taken from the cervix. Clinical trials have shown that screening for Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) every five years is more effective than, and just as safe as, screening with a Pap test every two years.

Cells are collected from your cervix and sent to a laboratory where they are tested for the presence of HPV. If the results show the presence of HPV, the pathology laboratory will conduct a test on the original sample to determine if any cervical cell abnormalities are present.

Women who test positive for any HPV strains will be managed by their doctor or referred to a specialist for investigations which may include a colposcopy.

See '[A Guide To Understanding Your Cervical Screening Test Results](#)' for more information.

Where can I have a Cervical Screening Test?

You can have a Cervical Screening Test at:

- your doctors
- some women's health centres and some community health centres
- Aboriginal health services
- Migrant Health Service
- limited services available at ShineSA clinics.

Your results will be sent to your doctor or health service, in about 1–2 weeks. Make sure you contact your doctor for your results. Always see your doctor if you have any new symptoms e.g. unusual bleeding.

HPV vaccine—what do I need to know?

Most changes to the cells of the cervix are due to an infection called HPV—Human Papilloma Virus.

Anyone who has ever had sexual contact could have HPV—it is so common that four in five people will have had genital HPV at some time in their lives. In most women the virus clears up naturally in one to two years. Although HPV infection can cause cell changes that could lead to cervical cancer it usually take a long time, often more than 10 years.

There is a vaccine available that can prevent new infection with some of the types of HPV that have been associated with causing cervical cancer, anal cancer and genital warts. It is advised that young people are vaccinated before they have been exposed to the virus e.g. before they have had any sexual contact. The vaccine is available in Australia, free, for boys and girls aged 12 and 13 under the National HPV Vaccination Program.

In Australia the vaccine is approved for use in males and females from 9–26 years. For those that did not receive the vaccination during the School Immunisation Program and would like to be immunised will need to get the vaccine from a doctor. It will cost approximately \$450 for the full three-dose course, which is given over eight months.

Women still need to have regular Cervical Screening Tests from the age of 25, even after having the vaccine.

Related links

[National Cervical Screening Program](#) - additional resources, including HPV and cervix cancer, and resources in other languages

[HPV vaccine and cervical screening information](#) - Cancer Council Australia resource

[National HPV Vaccination Program](#) - who is eligible and how to get the vaccine

[Cervical screening](#) - what this means for you

[Cervical cancer screening](#) - Cancer Council Australia position statement

[Diethylstilbestrol \(DES\) and Cancer](#) - DES was taken by some women in the 1950-70's to try and prevent miscarriage and other pregnancy complications. Although the majority of persons exposed to DES, during pregnancy or in utero, will not experience any negative health effects, available research findings indicate that exposure to DES increases the risk of some health problems including some cancers.

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