



# CERVICAL SCREENING COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

spread the word about cervical  
screening and help us save lives

NATIONAL  
**CERVICAL SCREENING**  
PROGRAM

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

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# THE COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

This communication toolkit has been developed by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

The toolkit is designed to ensure consistent messages are communicated to all stakeholders and relevant audiences about the National Cervical Screening Program, the Cervical Screening Test, including the Cervical Screening Test self-collect option.

The toolkit contains key messages, social content, images, and case studies that can be used directly, or adapted or edited for your channels and outlets such as electronic direct mail (EDM) marketing and newsletters.

**Please use the content on your own platforms and channels to help spread the word about the importance of regular cervical screening, and in particular the option for self-collection.**

You're welcome to contact the Cancer Screening Communication and Partnerships team at [CancerScreeningCommunications@health.gov.au](mailto:CancerScreeningCommunications@health.gov.au) if you have any questions about this toolkit.

*The toolkit was last updated: 15 November 2023*

## TERMS OF USE

The messages, images and assets within this toolkit can be used to encourage participation in and awareness of cervical screening and the National Cervical Screening Program.

The messages, images and assets **should not** be used to:

- Promote screening outside of [National Cervical Screening Program eligibility](#)
- Promote a business (except those affiliated with delivering cervical screening in accordance with the [Cervical Screening Clinical Guidelines](#)).

## COPYRIGHT/CREDITS

The images used throughout this toolkit are copyright Department of Health and Aged Care. Please do not amend.

Illustrations by: [Chanell Kristen](#)

Photography by: [Lightbulb Studio](#)

# ABOUT THE NCSP

The National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) aims to reduce illness and deaths from cervical cancer by encouraging women and people with a cervix, aged 25-74, who have ever had any sexual contact, to have regular cervical screening.



The NCSP is a joint initiative of the Australian and state and territory governments.

# ABOUT THE CERVICAL SCREENING TEST

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. Most cervical cancers occur in women and people with a cervix who have never screened or do not screen regularly. Having regular screening tests is the best way to protect yourself.

The Cervical Screening Test replaced the Pap test (or Pap smear) in 2017. The Cervical Screening Test detects the presence of human papillomavirus (HPV) – the cause of almost all cervical cancers – so that it can be monitored or investigated further if needed.

Eligible women and people with a cervix can choose to have a Cervical Screening Test either by:

- taking their own sample from their vagina, using a simple swab, or
- having a healthcare provider collect the sample from the cervix using a speculum.



# NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAM STYLE GUIDE

## Websites

[www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)

[www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect)

## Branding

If you would like high resolution copies of these logos, please email

[CancerScreeningCommunications@health.gov.au](mailto:CancerScreeningCommunications@health.gov.au).

NATIONAL  
CERVICAL SCREENING  
PROGRAM

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

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Note: the reversed logo does not sit in a purple rectangle. The purple background is only used to illustrate how it looks reversed out/white.

## Colours

PANTONE 267 C    #584099    R 88 G 64 B 153

PANTONE 7443 U    #DBD4EB    R 219 G 212 B 235

## Typeface / font

### Gotham Rounded

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn  
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

### Gotham Rounded Medium

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn  
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

### Gotham Book

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn  
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

### Gotham

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn  
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz



## Videos and animations

The department's YouTube channel has [numerous videos on cervical screening and the NCSP](#) – these can be added to posts and content as required.

## QR Codes

Below are QR codes that link to [health.gov.au/ncsp](https://health.gov.au/ncsp). If you require transparent or high-resolution copies of these QR codes please email [CancerScreeningCommunications@health.gov.au](mailto:CancerScreeningCommunications@health.gov.au).



## Images / social image assets

We have created a number of high-resolution social media assets and images for you to use to promote the NCSP and cervical screening. You can find these on the [NCSP website](#).

## Hashtags

#CervicalCancer #CervicalCancerAwareness #CervicalScreening #CervicalScreeningTest  
#CervicalScreeningSelfCollect #CancerScreening #CancerScreeningSavesLives  
#PreventCervicalCancer #NationalCervicalScreeningProgram #NCSP

## Cervical Screening Glossary

In writing about and discussing cervical screening, some terminology can be tricky. With this in mind, we have created a glossary – please see [Appendix B](#).

# GENERAL AUDIENCE CONTENT

## National Cervical Screening Program and National Cancer Screening Register key messages

- The National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) is a joint initiative of the Australian and state and territory governments.
- The NCSP aims to reduce illness and deaths from cervical cancer by encouraging women and people with a cervix aged 25-74, who have ever had any sexual contact, to do routine cervical screening.
- Australia is one of the first countries to introduce an HPV-based Cervical Screening Test as part of a national population screening program.
- Australia's world-leading screening program, combined with our HPV vaccination program, means we are on track to be the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health concern.
- The NCSP is supported by the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR). The NCSR stores a single electronic record for each person in Australia participating in cervical and bowel screening.
- The NCSR sends out timely screening invitations and reminder letters to eligible women and people with a cervix who are due for their cervical screening, as well up follow-up recommendations after testing (if required).

## Cervical screening key messages

- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.
- Having 5-yearly Cervical Screening Tests is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer.
- More than 70% of Australians diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer are under-screened or have never screened.
- In 2017, the 5-yearly Cervical Screening Test was introduced, replacing the 2-yearly Pap test in Australia.
- The Pap test looked for abnormal cells or cell changes in the cervix that could lead to cervical cancer, but the Cervical Screening Test detects human papillomavirus (HPV) – the common virus that leads to those changes in the cervix and is responsible for almost all cervical cancers.
- There are 2 options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect your sample. The other option is to collect your own sample.
- You should speak with your healthcare provider about which cervical screening option is best for you.

- If you're a woman or person with a cervix, aged 25-74, and have ever had sexual contact, you should do your cervical screening every 5 years.
- It makes no difference if you
  - have had the HPV vaccination or not
  - have been through menopause
  - have had a baby or are pregnant (ensure to let your health care professional know)
- You still need to screen even if you
  - haven't been sexually active for a long time
  - have only been with one sexual partner
  - are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer and have a cervix
  - are transgender, gender diverse, or non-binary and have a cervix
  - have ever had any form of sexual contact (including as part of foreplay or non-penetrative sex)
- Cervical screening is facilitated through a doctor, nurse, or health worker with a rebate for the Cervical Screening Test provided through Medicare (*consultation fees may apply*).
- To check if you're due or overdue for a Cervical Screening Test, contact your healthcare provider. If you're due, book your test today.
- If someone you love is eligible and has never screened or hasn't screened for some time, encourage them to do their cervical screening.
- If you don't have a preferred healthcare provider, [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find a healthcare provider to book your test with. You can also use this service to find healthcare providers that offer bulk billing (no fees) for consultations.
- Further information about the NCSP is available at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp).
- You can also contact the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR) to find out if you are due or overdue for your screening, to change your contact details, or to ask any other questions about the NCSP. Call 1800 627 701 or link your account via [www.my.gov.au](http://www.my.gov.au) and access the NCSR Participant Portal.

## Self-collection key messages

- Self-collection may be a more acceptable and comfortable screening option for you.
- Self-collection provides you with a level of control and choice over how you collect your Cervical Screening Test sample.
- The self-collected sample is taken from the vagina and is checked for human papillomavirus (HPV) – the common virus that causes almost all cervical cancers. HPV can be detected by taking a sample from inside the vagina, so there's no need to access the cervix.



- A Cervical Screening Test using a self-collected sample from your vagina is just as safe and as accurate at detecting HPV as a healthcare provider-collected sample taken from the cervix during a speculum examination – what used to be known as a pap smear.
- If you decide collecting your own sample is the best option for you, your healthcare provider will give you a swab and instructions on how to collect your sample.
- Self-collection is a simple process and you don't need to worry about reaching your cervix – just insert the swab a few centimetres into your vagina and rotate it for 20-30 seconds to collect a sample.
- The sample can be taken in a private place within a healthcare clinic, like behind a curtain or in the bathroom. You can also talk to your healthcare provider about other options on where you can collect your sample, including following a telehealth appointment.
- If you think you may have difficulty collecting a vaginal sample by yourself and would prefer a sample be collected without the use of a speculum, you can also ask your healthcare provider to help you do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test.
- Your healthcare provider will send your sample to the lab and talk to you about your results.
- If HPV is found, you will need to return to have a sample collected by your healthcare provider or specialist to further check for abnormal cervical cell changes.

## HEALTHCARE PROVIDER AUDIENCE CONTENT

### Cervical screening key messages

- Healthcare providers play a central and critical role in the National Cervical Screening Program. Healthcare providers can increase understanding of, and participation in, the program by:
  - reminding patients when they are due for cervical screening
  - telling patients about the benefits of cervical screening and their options for having a Cervical Screening Test
  - explaining how the new test looks for human papillomavirus (HPV)
  - explaining the difference between self-collected and healthcare provider-collected samples
  - advising how and when the results are provided
  - reminding them that after their first Cervical Screening Test, screening is every 5 years, if no HPV is found
  - reassuring them that it's a straightforward process that is private and confidential.
- Patients should be encouraged to participate in the NCSP if they:

- are a woman or person with a cervix
- are aged 25 to 74
- have ever had any type of sexual contact.
- Medicare covers one routine/primary Cervical Screening Test every 5 years for women and people with a cervix aged 25-74. Patients are eligible for the Medicare rebate 4 years and 9 months from their last screening as the National Cancer Screening Register sends them their reminder letter three months before their five-year due date.
- Patients will receive a private bill for early routine screens (i.e. less than 4 years 9 months since last screen) and screens done outside of the eligibility age range (25-74).
- Healthcare providers can refer to the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care's [NCSP Healthcare Provider Toolkit](#). The information in the toolkit helps support you to learn about the NCSP, support patients before, during and after a screening appointment, and tailor support to specific groups of people.
- The NCSR's Healthcare Provider Portal (HCP Portal) and clinical software integration makes helping patients with their cervical and bowel screening even easier. Through the HCP Portal, healthcare providers can:
  - access a patient's cervical and bowel screening results and histories online
  - submit cervical screening related forms, results and reports electronically
  - (with patient consent) update patient information, including the ability to nominate a healthcare provider or personal representative, defer the patient's next screening, or opt the patient in or out of either program.
- Further information on the NCSR, HCP Portal and clinical software integration is available at [www.ncsr.gov.au/hcp](http://www.ncsr.gov.au/hcp).
- If you decide to defer your patient's Cervical Screening Test or follow up:
  1. notify the NCSR of your decision to reschedule via phone or complete the online form
  2. state how long you want to defer for. This allows the NCSR to send reminders at the right time.
- Further information about the NCSP is available at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp).

## Cervical screening self-collect option key messages

- Under the National Cervical Screening Program, all participants can choose to screen using either a self-collected vaginal sample or a healthcare provider-collected sample from the cervix, accessed through a healthcare provider in both cases.
- Healthcare providers are best placed to talk with their patients about cervical screening to determine the best option of testing for their patients.

- Self-collection is not appropriate for patients that require a co-test, for example because they are symptomatic or if they were exposed to Diethylstilboestrol (DES) in utero.
- Patients with symptoms that could indicate cervical abnormalities or cancer require diagnostic testing and should be managed in accordance with the [National Cervical Screening Program Guidelines](#).
- Healthcare providers will need to give clear information to their patients on the pros and cons of both screening options (including possible follow-up requirements if HPV is detected using self-collection) to support informed decision-making by the patient.
- Healthcare providers will still need to offer a consultation for cervical screening whether it be a self-collected vaginal sample or healthcare provider-collected cervical sample. Where self-collection is chosen, healthcare providers can use the time saved to discuss sexual health, post self-collection follow up and other health matters.
- Self-collection should be offered in a clinic-setting wherever possible. However, self-collection may occur in other settings at the discretion of the requesting healthcare provider and with the recommended self-collection swab.
- If HPV is detected on a self-collected vaginal sample, depending on the type of HPV detected, the patient will need to return for a healthcare provider -collected cervical sample for LBC testing, or referral to a specialist.
- It is the responsibility of the requesting healthcare provider to facilitate patient access to, and return of, self-collection swabs, requesting tests from laboratories (including identifying the sample as self-collected on the pathology request form) and communicating results and any follow-up requirements to patients.
- Recent evidence shows a Cervical Screening Test using a self-collected vaginal sample is as accurate in detecting HPV as a healthcare provider collected sample taken from the cervix during a speculum examination.
- A summary of the evidence of self-collection sensitivity can be found in the [National Cervical Screening Program Clinical Guidelines](#).
- Self-collection allows all eligible cervical screening participants to have the option to take their own vaginal sample for HPV testing, removing a significant barrier to participation in screening<sup>1</sup>.
- There are some groups that are less likely to screen, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disabilities, people who have experienced sexual violence, post-menopausal women and people who have had previous negative cervical screening experiences. Self-collection may be more acceptable to these groups.
- Self-collection may also improve general screening participation. A pilot demonstrated that 85.7% of never-screened or under-screened women and people with a cervix who declined a

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<sup>1</sup> [University of Melbourne and Victorian Cytology Service Ltd 2017 Self-collection Pilot Project - improving access to cervical screening for under-screened women](#)

speculum examination agreed to HPV self-collection when the test was offered to them in a sensitive and culturally appropriate manner and with appropriate follow-up advice<sup>2</sup>.

- Resources relating to the Cervical Screening Test self-collect option, including a healthcare provider toolkit, are available at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp).

## CERVICAL SCREENING SOCIAL MEDIA COPY

Below are some examples of social media copy that can be used to promote cervical screening.


### Facebook/Instagram

Cervical screening saves lives. The Cervical Screening Test can help detect signs of cervical cancer in the earliest stages, so it can be investigated and treated if needed.

You should do your cervical screening every five years if you:


- ✔ are a woman or person with a cervix
- ✔ are aged 25 to 74
- ✔ have ever had any type of sexual contact

Talking to your healthcare provider will help you get the best information and advice on cervical screening.

You can also visit  [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp) for more information on cervical screening and the National Cervical Screening Program.

It's important that anyone with a cervix aged 25-74, who has had sexual contact of any kind, screens for cervical cancer.

Do your cervical screening every five years and get peace of mind. Make sure your loved ones are up to date with their screening too.

Visit  [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp) for more information on the National Cervical Screening Program.

Doing your cervical screening every five years is the best way to protect yourself against cervical cancer.

More than 70% of Australians diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer are under-screened or have never screened.

Talking to your healthcare provider will help you get the best information and advice on cervical screening.

<sup>2</sup> Saville M, Hawkes D, Mclachlan E, Anderson S, Arabena K. Self-collection for under-screened women in a National Cervical Screening Program: pilot study. *Current Oncology* 2018 25/2/2018

Find out more about cervical screening and the National Cervical Screening Program at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)

Lots of people will get human papillomavirus (HPV) in their lives – it's a very common infection. Most cases of HPV clear up on their own, however, sometimes it can develop into cancer.

Early detection of HPV could save your life. Cervical screening involves a simple procedure to check for HPV and detect any abnormalities before cancer has a chance to develop.

Even if you've had the HPV vaccination, you still need to do your cervical screening if you're a woman or person with a cervix aged 25-74, and have ever had sexual contact (with anyone, regardless of gender).

Contact your GP or healthcare provider to check if you're due or overdue for a Cervical Screening Test.

If you don't have a preferred healthcare provider, [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find a healthcare provider to book your test with.

Visit [health.gov.au/ncsp](http://health.gov.au/ncsp) for more info.

Did you know you only need to have a cervical screening every five years? One simple test every five years is a good deal for peace of mind.

Almost all cervical cancers are preventable with early detection, so contact your healthcare provider to check if you're due or overdue for a Cervical Screening Test.

And if someone you love is eligible and has never screened or hasn't screened for some time, encourage them to do their cervical screening – it could save their life.

Visit [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp) for more information on the National Cervical Screening Program.

You can choose to have a Cervical Screening Test either by:

- taking your own sample from your vagina, using a simple swab (self-collection) or
- having a healthcare provider collect your sample from the cervix using a speculum and swab.

Both options are:

- free under Medicare – so if your healthcare provider bulk bills for consultations, the whole thing is free
- accessed through a healthcare provider
- accurate and safe ways to collect a sample for a Cervical Screening Test.

When you opt to collect your own sample, you will be provided with a swab by your healthcare provider and instructions on how to do the test at the clinic. The sample can be taken in a private space (behind a curtain or in the bathroom).

💜 Prevention is in your hands 💜

You can choose to collect your own Cervical Screening Test sample.

Self-collection may be a more acceptable and comfortable screening option for you.

Speak with your healthcare provider about whether you are due for cervical screening and if a self-collected Cervical Screening Test is the best option for you.

Visit [www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect) for more information.

When you're next due for a Cervical Screening Test, speak to your doctor or healthcare provider about your screening options.

If you decide collecting your own sample is the best option for you, your healthcare provider will give you a swab and instructions on how to collect your sample.

Having a healthcare provider involved in the process is important because they can:

- ✅ explain how to collect the sample
- ✅ give support or help in collecting the sample (if you need and want it)
- ✅ organise and explain your results
- ✅ support you with any follow-up appointments you may need
- ✅ answer any questions you may have.

More information about cervical screening, including the self-collection option and the National Cervical Screening Program, is available at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)

## Twitter

The #CervicalScreeningTest looks for Human papillomavirus (HPV) – the very common infection that causes almost all #CervicalCancer. Even if you've had the HPV vaccine, you still need to do your #CervicalScreening every 5 years.

Remember the 'Pap Test'? Australia now has the #CervicalScreeningTest. This test detects HPV - the cause of almost all cervical cancers - before it has the chance to develop into abnormal or cancerous cells. This means we can detect earlier and save more lives.

There are two options for having a #CervicalScreeningTest. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect your sample from your cervix. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina. Call your healthcare provider to arrange either option.



There are two options for having a #CervicalScreeningTest

1. have a doctor collect a sample, or
2. self-collect a sample.

Both options are safe and accurate.

Did you know the #NationalCervicalScreeningProgram offers all eligible screeners the option to self-collect their #CervicalScreeningTest sample? Speak to your healthcare provider about this option next time you're due to screen.

Not everyone is comfortable with their doctor collecting a #CervicalScreeningTest (formerly a Pap Smear). You can choose to collect your own Cervical Screening Test sample – it's a simple process of using a swab to collect a sample from your own vagina. This can be done in a private space.

Even with the HPV vaccination, cervical screening should be an important part of regular health checks for women and people with a cervix who are 25-74 and have ever had sexual contact (of any kind, with any gender).

You should book a cervical screening test every 5 years if you:

- are a woman or person with a cervix
- are aged between 25 & 74
- have ever had sexual contact (of any kind, with any gender)

Encourage your friends & family too. Cervical screening saves lives.

## CASE STUDIES / PERSONAL STORIES

Below are some case studies from people who have done their cervical screening. These can be used to inform content and promote screening.

### **Jenni, cervical cancer survivor**

"I always attended my regular cervical screenings and had no previous cause for concern.

In 2018, I had my first Cervical Screening Test under the new National Cervical Screening Program. The new test looks for HPV, not just for abnormal cells like the Pap test did. My test came back with an abnormal result, and I was found positive for HPV.

While most cases of HPV don't result into anything serious, unfortunately mine led to diagnosis of Stage 1 cervical cancer. This cancer was only picked up thanks to the new Cervical Screening Test.

Luckily, the cancer was detected early before it had invaded my lymph nodes, and I was spared from having chemotherapy and radiation. I was also able to avoid a radical hysterectomy, which means I can still have children if I want to.

I can tell you from experience, the 5 minutes of slight discomfort from the Cervical Screening Test is nothing compared to cervical cancer treatment.

### **Samantha's story - Surviving HPV related cancer**

After being diagnosed after her regular cervical screening, Samantha survived cervical cancer that her doctor said was highly likely caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). The HPV vaccine was not available to her when she was younger. It is now available for males and females aged 12 to 13 years through school-based immunisation providers. Samantha urges all parents to sign the consent form so their child can be protected against HPV related disease.

### **Rena's story**

*Rena is a Lebanese Australian woman in her 30s, her mother has limited English and is 65.*

I had been putting off my cervical screening because I wasn't comfortable with the process. My friend recently told me I have a choice about how to take the test and I can even do it myself.

I've already spoken to my mum. She's also due for a test and doesn't have good English. I go to most of her doctor appointments. I explained to her that we now have a choice for this test.

My mum isn't confident to take her own test because her mobility isn't too good - so her GP will do it for her. And I'm more comfortable to collect my own sample. I've made appointments for us to have the test next month.

I know that the process will be explained to me, that I can watch a video to understand how to do it and even ask my doctor for help if I don't know how to do it.

'For my family, it's important that I keep healthy. Taking this test every 5 years means I can keep myself safe to my children and my mum.'

I think this is a great change for lots of people in my community. The community is comfortable with testing themselves for COVID-19, more of these kinds of tests - especially for things that are a bit private - will mean more people will get tested and can protect themselves.

Visit [www.health.gov.au/NCSP-multicultural](http://www.health.gov.au/NCSP-multicultural) for more information.

### **Cara's story – self-collection**

Cara, aged 36, attended her GP for a routine appointment. During that appointment, her doctor talked to her about cervical screening and, after explaining the purpose and importance of regular screening, asked Cara whether she would be comfortable using the self-collection method to take a sample.

'I didn't even realise it was an option to do it myself, until my doctor offered it as a choice. He explained the process to me in a really clear, no fuss way. This made me feel really confident to self-collect'. Cara's doctor provided her with clear instructions and gave her a private space to take her own sample. 'I was able to use a private space and lock the door and didn't feel rushed at all. I really appreciated how comfortable I was made to feel. It was actually quite empowering.'

The self-collection process was quick and easy for Cara.

'Because my doctor was so reassuring about my ability to self-collect, and the quality of the results that will come back, I found the whole experience really positive. I will definitely choose to self-collect again.'

### **Marcia's story – self-collection**

*Marcia is an older Aboriginal woman.*

A Cervical Screening Test is something Aussie women can do every 5 years to prevent cervical cancer.

As Wiradjuri grandmother Marcia found out, the new option of self-collection has made doing the test quicker and easier than ever.

When she arrived for her appointment at her local Aboriginal Medical Clinic, a nurse showed her behind a screen, and Marcia took it from there. 'After I made the choice, the only thing that that worried me was that I wouldn't do it properly,' she recalls. 'But the instructions were very clear and easy to follow, so that made me feel better about it.'

'I'd say it was much quicker and more comfortable than doing the old Pap test, and I liked that I could do it in private.'

Marcia wants others to know how important it is to do the test, for yourself and your family.

'I'm glad I've done the test. It's really important to me to show my daughters and their babies that we have access to choices that can prevent disease, and we should take them,' she reflects.

'My mother's generation didn't talk about this stuff much. I want to reverse that trend and be open about women's health, especially with my daughters.'

'They're proud that I want to take care of myself and be fit and healthy into the future. And I want to be around to see my grandbabies grow up and be happy and healthy.'

# CERVICAL SCREENING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Where is the cervix?

The cervix is located at the entrance to the womb from the vagina. The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus that forms a canal between the uterus and vagina.

## What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?

Common symptoms of early cervical cancer can include:

- vaginal bleeding when you do not expect it — for example, between periods, after menopause or after sex
- heavier or longer periods than usual
- unusual vaginal discharge
- pelvic pain
- continual pain during sex

Anyone with a cervix (of any age) who has symptoms should see their healthcare provider immediately.

## What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening is a simple test (the Cervical Screening Test) to collect a sample from your cervix or vagina. The sample is then tested for signs of the human papillomavirus (HPV) – the common virus that causes almost all cervical cancer.

There are two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect a sample from your cervix. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina.

## What's the difference between the Cervical Screening Test options?

There are two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect a sample from your cervix using a speculum and swab. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina using just a swab.

The biggest difference between the two is that the self-collect option uses a swab to take a sample from the vagina to test for HPV only and does not include cells from the cervix.

If HPV is detected, the cervical cells will also need to be examined to check whether the HPV has caused any cell changes or abnormalities.

If your sample was taken from the cervix by a healthcare provider, the cervical cells will be present and can automatically be tested. However, if your sample was self-collected, you will need to return to your healthcare provider for a speculum examination so a sample of cells can be taken from the cervix.

## Who is eligible for cervical screening?

You are eligible for a Medicare subsidised Cervical Screening Test if you are:

- a woman or person with a cervix
- aged between 25 and 74
- sexually active or ever had any type of sexual contact (this includes oral sex or any intimate genital skin-to-skin contact)

It makes no difference if you:

- are gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight
- non-binary, transgender or intersex
- have had the HPV vaccination or not
- are no longer sexually active
- have been with only one sexual partner
- have been through menopause
- have had a baby or are pregnant (ensure to let your health care professional know).

If you have had a full or partial hysterectomy, please check with your doctor about cervical screening.

### **What if I am outside the target age range for cervical screening?**

#### **Under 25**

Even if you had sexual contact at an early age, there's no need to begin routine cervical screening before 25. Most HPV infections found in the before-25 age group are considered temporary and usually go away by themselves. Cervical cancer is also rare in this age group.

Starting routine cervical screening at age 25 means we prevent a lot of unnecessary tests and treatment.

Of course, if you have any concerns or notice any symptoms before you turn 25, contact your healthcare provider.

#### **75 or over**

If you're 75 or over, you can still ask to have a subsidised Cervical Screening Test – just talk to your healthcare provider.

Women and people with a cervix aged 70-74 should have an "exit" Cervical Screening Test to test that they can safely "exit" the screening program. If HPV is not detected, the risk of developing cervical cancer is very low. Evidence shows that people of this age can safely stop having Cervical Screening Tests.

If you have not had regular Cervical Screening Tests or have had abnormal results from recent Cervical Screening Tests, you may need to keep having tests for a few more years. We encourage you to talk to a healthcare provider for advice.

### **How often should I do cervical screening?**

You are eligible to have your first Cervical Screening Test when you turn 25 and should keep screening every 5 years until you are 74.

If HPV isn't found, you only need to come back every 5 years. It can take almost a decade for an infection with HPV to cause cell changes – so you should feel comfortable and very safe about the 5-year interval.

### **How do I know if I am due for cervical screening?**

Contact your GP or healthcare provider to check if you're due or overdue for a Cervical Screening Test. You can also call the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR) on 1800 627 701 to find out when you're next due for a Cervical Screening Test.

The NCSR also has a Participant Portal that allows you to view your cancer screening program details, including when you are next due. You can access this through [www.my.gov.au](http://www.my.gov.au).

### **What if I experience symptoms before my 5-year check-up?**

The routine Cervical Screening Test is for women and people with a cervix who do not have symptoms. We encourage you to discuss any symptoms directly with your healthcare provider, who will be able to advise you further.

### **Where can I get a Cervical Screening Test?**

You can get a Cervical Screening Test at different places Australia-wide. These include:

- a doctor's clinic
- a community health centre
- a women's health centre
- a family planning clinic
- a sexual health clinic
- an Aboriginal Medical Service or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service

Just call to book an appointment and let them know you'd like to have a Cervical Screening Test. If you think you would like to do the Cervical Screening Test self-collect option, mention this when you make the appointment.

If you don't have a preferred healthcare provider, [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find a healthcare provider to book your cervical screening with.

### **Does the Cervical Screening Test cost?**

There is a Medicare rebate for both Cervical Screening Test options – self-collected and healthcare provider-collected. If your chosen health service bulk bills there should be no cost to you, depending on when you had your last test – you are eligible for a Medicare rebate every 4 years and 9 months.

Some health services do charge a consultation fee, so it's best to check if there are any extra costs when making your appointment.

If you would like to find a healthcare provider that bulk bills, [healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find one to book your cervical screening with.

### **Is the Cervical Screening Test safe?**

Yes. Both healthcare provider and self-collected tests are safe and accurate.

A summary of the evidence can be found in the [National Cervical Screening Program Clinical Guidelines](#).

### **What's the difference between the Pap test and the Cervical Screening Test?**

In December 2017, the 2-yearly Pap test was replaced with a more accurate 5-yearly Cervical Screening Test. The Pap test is not used in Australia anymore. The Pap test looked for cell changes in the cervix that could lead to cervical cancer, but the Cervical Screening Test looks for HPV - the cause of almost all cervical cancers - before the cells have a chance to change.

### **I had the HPV vaccination; do I still have to do cervical screening?**

Yes. Even if you've had the HPV vaccination, you still need to do regular cervical screening. The HPV vaccine doesn't protect against all HPV types that are associated with cancer of the cervix.



**I had my cervix removed with my hysterectomy; do I still have to do cervical screening?**

This will depend on the type of hysterectomy you had and on your previous screening history. It is best to speak with your GP about your individual circumstances and if you need to continue screening.

**I'm a lesbian and have only had sex with women; do I need to do cervical screening?**

Yes. Anyone who has had ANY type of sexual contact (with anyone, even of the same gender) can get HPV - the common virus that causes almost all cervical cancers. HPV is shared through human to human, skin to skin sexual contact.

**I am a transgender man with a cervix; do I need to do cervical screening?**

Yes. If you're trans or non-binary and have a cervix, you should get screened every 5 years. Anyone with a cervix is at risk of developing cervical cancer.

The Cervical Screening Test self-collect option is available if you are not comfortable with a healthcare provider-collected test.

**I'm pregnant; can I still do cervical screening?**

Yes. Cervical screening is generally safe in pregnancy.

Many people go to see their doctor when they're pregnant or think they might be. If you're over 25 and pregnant, that's the perfect opportunity to have a Cervical Screening Test if you haven't had one yet.

The Cervical Screening Test self-collection option is also available and safe in pregnancy.

**Can I do cervical screening when I have my period?**

Yes. You can do the Cervical Screening Test while you have your period. However, we'd suggest you try to book when you don't have your period or not on the heavy bleeding days (usually the first day or two of your period) – this can help you feel more comfortable.

**Why do you use the term 'women and person with a cervix'?**

In most instances, we use the terms 'women' and 'men' because they are the simplest terms to use when talking about health and are easily understood by the general population. However, we also recognise that Australia is made up of a diverse group of individuals, so in some programs we do use language with gender diverse terminology. In these instances, we generally add other gender identities as additions to, not replacements of, those terms.

For example, the National Cervical Screening Program uses 'women and people with a cervix' when referring to cervical screening gender eligibility. This terminology aims to reach as many people as possible to encourage them to have regular, life-saving cervical screening. This includes those who identify as women and other gender diverse people with a cervix. This approach also acknowledges that not all women have cervixes (e.g. due to hysterectomy).

Our main goal is to make sure that everyone who is eligible for cervical screening is aware of the importance of regular screening because cancer screening saves lives.

# CERVICAL SCREENING SELF-COLLECT

## OPTION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Who can choose to self-collect a Cervical Screening Test sample?**

Anyone eligible and due for cervical screening can choose to collect their Cervical Screening Test sample themselves, unless they require a co-test, for example because they have symptoms of cervical cancer or if they were exposed to Diethylstilboestrol (DES) in utero.

### **Do I have to do self-collect? Can I still have the doctor collect my sample?**

The self-collection option is just that – an option. You can continue to have your Cervical Screening Test done by your chosen healthcare provider using a speculum examination if you prefer.

You can also choose to have your healthcare provider assist you with taking the self-collect sample from your vagina only.

You can discuss the options with your healthcare provider to find out which choice is best for you.

### **How do I do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? Can I have one sent to my home or pick one up from a chemist/pharmacy?**

The National Cervical Screening Program is not delivering a home mail-out program at this time. You should speak with your doctor or healthcare provider about doing a self-collected test.

If you choose to self-collect your Cervical Screening Test you will be given a swab, instructions, and a private space to collect the sample at the clinic (e.g. behind a curtain or in a bathroom).

### **Why is a doctor still involved in the process if it's self-collected?**

The doctor or nurse does not need to oversee or be present when you collect your own sample, but it is important that you have the necessary support from a healthcare provider to make sure the test is performed correctly, answer any questions you may have, provide your results and explain what they may mean, and support you in any follow-up examinations.

### **Does self-collection cost more?**

The Cervical Screening Test is covered under Medicare – provided you are eligible for cervical screening, and only have one Cervical Screening Test (either self-collected or healthcare provider-collected) every 5 years. It does not matter which sample collection method you choose for your Cervical Screening Test.

Some practices or health services do charge a consultation fee, so it's best to check if there are any extra costs when making your appointment.

If you would like to find a bulk-billing healthcare provider, you can visit [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au) to find one.

### **How do I know I am getting the right spot/my cervix?**

The Cervical Screening Test detects HPV before it has the chance to cause abnormal or cancerous cells. HPV can be detected from inside the vagina so there is no need for the collection swab to reach the cervix as part of the self-collected test.

The swab used for the Cervical Screening Test self-collect option only needs to be inserted into the vagina a few centimetres and rotated for 20-30 seconds.

### **When is self-collection not appropriate?**

Self-collection of a vaginal sample is not appropriate for those who require a co-test, for example because they have cervical cancer symptoms.

A co-test is where the pathology laboratory tests for both HPV and liquid-based cytology (LBC) on the same sample at the same time. This means that the LBC test is done regardless of the HPV test result. An LBC test can be used to check for abnormal cervical cells.

A co-test requires a healthcare provider-collected cervical sample and cannot be performed on a self-collected vaginal sample.

### **What happens if my self-collected test comes back positive for HPV?**

If HPV is detected in the results of your self-collected cervical screening test, your healthcare provider will recommend you return to have a healthcare provider-collected test to investigate further.



# APPENDIX A: USEFUL RESOURCES

These and other resources are available at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp).



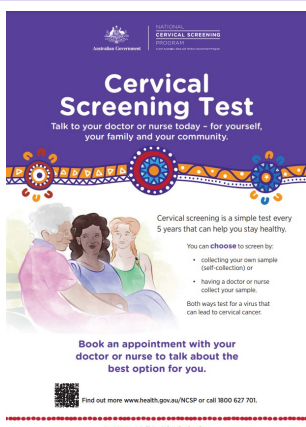
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Resource type: Poster

File type/s: PDF, Word

Intended audience: General public, healthcare providers

[Available here.](#)



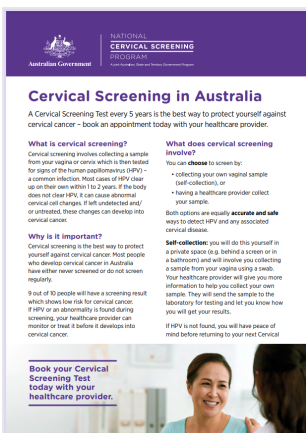
Resource name: A new and better test for women

Resource type: Poster

File type/s: PDF, PNG

Intended audience: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

[Available here.](#)



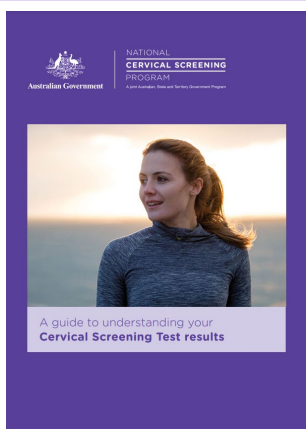
Resource name: Cervical Screening in Australia

Resource type: Factsheet

File type/s: PDF, Word

Intended audience: General public, healthcare providers

[Available here.](#)



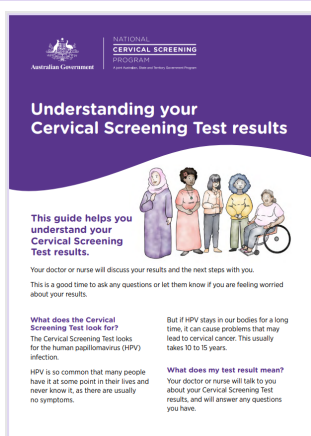
Resource name: A guide to understanding your Cervical Screening Test results

Resource type: Brochure

File type/s: PDF, Word

Intended audience: General public

[Available here.](#)



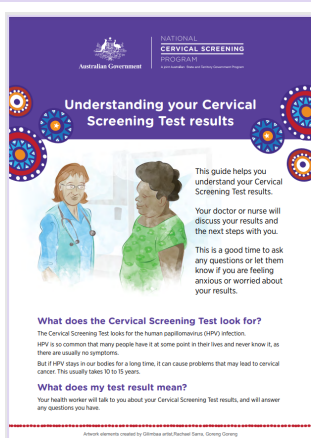
Resource name: A guide to understanding your Cervical Screening Test results – Easy Read

Resource type: Brochure

File type/s: PDF, Word

Intended audience: People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

[Available here.](#)



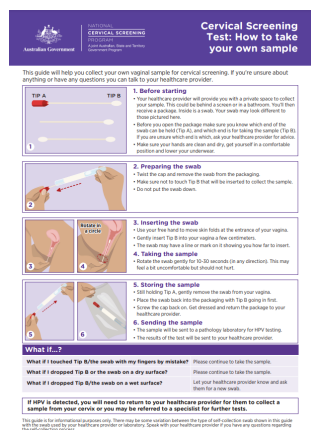
Resource name: A guide to understanding your cervical screening test results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Resource type: Brochure

File type/s: PDF

Intended audience: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

[Available here.](#)



Resource name: How to collect your own vaginal sample for a Cervical Screening Test

Resource type: Infographic, Fact Sheet

File type/s: PDF, Word

Intended audience: General public, healthcare providers

[Available here.](#)



Resource name: How to collect your own sample

Resource type: Infographic

File type/s: PDF

Intended audience: General public

[Available here.](#)





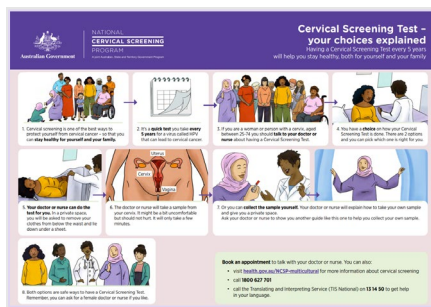
Resource name: How to collect your own sample

Resource type: Infographic

File type/s: PDF

Intended audience: General public

[Available here.](#)



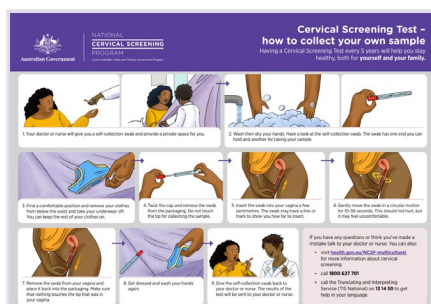
Resource name: Cervical Screening test – Your choices explained

Resource type: Infographic

File type/s: PDF, PNG

Intended audience: People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

[Available here.](#)



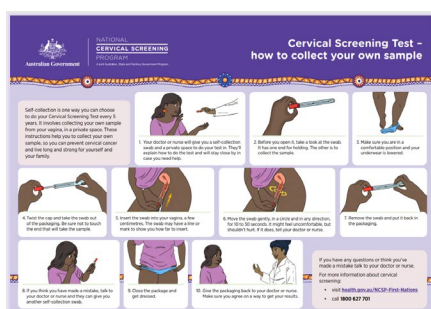
Resource name: How to collect your own sample

Resource type: Infographic

File type/s: PDF, PNG

Intended audience: People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

[Available here.](#)



Resource name: How to collect your own vaginal sample for a Cervical Screening Test for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Resource type: Infographic

File type/s: PDF, PNG

Intended audience: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

[Available here.](#)



## APPENDIX B: CERVICAL SCREENING GLOSSARY

*Cervical screening is done using a Cervical Screening Test.*

Term	Meaning	Use example
Cervical cancer	<b>Noun;</b> the result of untreated cancerous cells in the cervix.	Having a Cervical Screening Test every 5 years is the best way to protect yourself from cervical cancer.
Cervical screening	<b>Verb;</b> The act of being screened for HPV, the main cause of cervical cancer. This is primarily facilitated by a healthcare provider using a Cervical Screening Test (CST) – either healthcare provider-collected or self-collected option.	You need to do your cervical screening every five years. Cervical screening could save your life. Don't forget to do your cervical screening when you're due.
Cervical Screening Test CST	<b>Noun;</b> The test used to collect a sample (either healthcare provider-collected or self-collected) that is tested for HPV and/or abnormal cancerous cells.	The Cervical Screening Test looks for HPV, which causes almost all cervical cancers.
Healthcare provider	<b>Noun;</b> A person's doctor, nurse, gynaecologist, healthcare clinic worker or other type of healthcare professional delivering cervical screening.	Speak with your healthcare provider about which cervical screening option is best for you.
Healthcare provider-collected Cervical Screening Test ( <b>Note:</b> 'clinician-collected', 'practitioner-collected', and 'GP-collected' can also be used in same context:)	<b>Noun;</b> For healthcare provider-collected tests, a brush is used by the healthcare provider to collect a sample from the cervical lining (generally using a speculum to open the vagina and access the cervix).	Participants can choose either a healthcare provider-collected Cervical Screening Test or a self-collected Cervical Screening Test.
Human papillomavirus (HPV)	<b>Noun;</b> a common infection that causes almost all cervical cancers. HPV is sexually transferred and can stay dormant in the system for a long time before it affects cells.	The Cervical Screening Test looks for the human papillomavirus (HPV) – the common virus that causes almost all cervical cancer.
National Cancer Screening Register NSCR	<b>Noun;</b> The national register for participant and healthcare provider cancer screening data.	The National Cancer Screening Register can track when participants are due and invite them to screen, and healthcare providers can check their patient's screening history and records.

Term	Meaning	Use example
National Cervical Screening Program NCSP	<b>Noun;</b> The national program for cervical screening – recommends women and people with a cervix aged 25-74 have routine screening every five years.	The National Cervical Screening Program aims to reduce illness and death from cervical cancer. Women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 74 years of age are invited to have a Cervical Screening Test every 5 years through their healthcare provider.
Never screened	<b>Noun;</b> A never-screened person is someone who has never been screened.	Self-collect can be offered to anyone who has never screened, as this may encourage them to screen.
Pap Test (or pap smear)	<b>Noun;</b> The test used in Australia until December 2017, when the Cervical Screening Test was introduced. The Pap Test sample was taken from the cervix lining and tested for cancerous or abnormal cells.	<i>(N/A – we do not use this term any more except in a past tense)</i> The Cervical Screening Test (formerly the Pap Test or pap smear) ... The Cervical Screening Test (previously known as the Pap Test or pap smear) ...
Participant/s	<b>Noun;</b> a woman or person with a cervix who has screened under the NCSP.	All NCSP participants are eligible to collect their own Cervical Screening Test sample.
Patient/s	<b>Noun;</b> anyone visiting a healthcare provider (may not be a participant/screener... yet)	Patients should be encouraged to do their cervical screening if they are a woman or person with a cervix aged 25-74.
(CST) Sample	<b>Noun;</b> The collection of cells taken via brush (HCP) or swab (self-collect) that are sent to the pathology lab for testing and results.	Your healthcare provider can collect your Cervical Screening Test sample, or you can collect your own sample.
Screener	<b>Noun;</b> a woman or person with a cervix who has or is doing their cervical screening.	Any screener is eligible to collect their own Cervical Screening Test sample.
Self-collect / self-collection	<b>Verb;</b> The option to and act of self-collecting your Cervical Screening Test sample.	You can now choose to self-collect your own Cervical Screening Test sample.
Self-collected Cervical Screening Test	<b>Noun;</b> For self-collected tests, the participant uses a dry swab to collect a sample from their vagina.	A self-collected Cervical Screening Test sample from the vagina is just as accurate at detecting HPV as a clinician-collected sample from the cervix.
Under screened	<b>Noun;</b> An under-screened person is overdue for screening by more than two years.	Self-collect should be offered to anyone who is under screened, as this may encourage them to screen.
Women and people with a cervix	<b>Noun;</b> gender/s eligible for cervical screening gender eligibility.	Women and people with a cervix aged 25-74 who have ever had sexual contact should do their cervical screening every 5 years.



[www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)

NATIONAL  

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**CERVICAL SCREENING**  

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PROGRAM

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program