

NATIONAL  
**CERVICAL SCREENING**  
PROGRAM

A joint Australian, state and territory government program

# The Cervical Screening Test

## Frequently asked questions about the self-collect option



# Do you have a question about...

<b>... the Cervical Screening Test? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>... the self-collect option for the Cervical Screening Test? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
What is a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....	3
What is the difference between a healthcare provider-collected and a self-collected test? .....	4
Is a self-collected sample as accurate as a healthcare provider-collected sample? .....	4
Who can do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....	4
Do I have to self-collect? Can I still have my doctor or healthcare provider collect my sample? .....	4
Can I self-collect if I think I have symptoms of cervical cancer? .....	4
<b>... getting a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Where can I get a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....	5
How do I organise a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....	5
Can I do a self-collect test when I have my period? .....	5
<b>...what happens during a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....</b>	<b>6</b>
How do I do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....	6
What happens during a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? .....	6
Does the doctor have to be present when I do a self-collect test? .....	6
How do I know I am getting the right spot/my cervix? .....	7
What if I can't do it right? .....	7
<b>...what happens after the test? .....</b>	<b>7</b>
What happens if my self-collected test comes back negative for HPV? .....	7
What happens if my self-collected test comes back positive for HPV? .....	7
<b>...something else? .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Why is a healthcare provider still involved in the process if it's self-collected? .....	8
Will self-collect test kits be mailed out to everyone? .....	8
Can I take the self-collected Cervical Screening Test home? .....	8

## ... the Cervical Screening Test?

Women and people with a cervix aged 25-74, who have ever had any type of sexual contact (of any kind) should have a Cervical Screening Test every 5 years.

The Cervical Screening Test is a routine test for people without signs of cervical cancer to check for the human papillomavirus (HPV) — a common infection and the cause of almost all cervical cancers.

The Cervical Screening Test replaced the Pap test (also known as the Pap smear) in Australia in 2017. The Pap smear is still used in some other countries, but we use the Cervical Screening Test because it is a more accurate test.

There are 2 options for how a Cervical Screening Test is done:

- a **'healthcare provider-collected test' or 'clinician-collected test'** – a healthcare provider can do the test for you using a speculum to access your cervix and a small brush to take a sample from the lining of your cervix, or
- a **'self-collected' test or a 'self-swab' test** – you can do the test yourself using a thin swab to collect a sample from your vagina.

Both methods are safe and accurate at detecting HPV.

Find out more about the Cervical Screening Test at [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)

## ... the self-collect option for the Cervical Screening Test?

### What is a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

The self-collection method for the Cervical Screening Test allows you to do the test yourself. It's easy; you use a thin swab to take a sample from your vagina (no need to reach the cervix). It's quick and private.

The test is organised through your healthcare provider (a doctor, nurse or other healthcare worker), but they do not need to be present when you do the test.

They will give you a tube with a swab inside it, instructions, and a private space to do the test. After you've done the test, all you need to do is give the tube back to your healthcare provider and they'll send your sample to the lab for testing. They'll also let you know your results.

View our step-by-step instructions on how to do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test at [www.health.gov.au/cervical-resources](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-resources)

#### Notes:

The National Cervical Screening Program uses the term 'healthcare provider' when referring to a doctor, nurse, or other healthcare worker who may be doing or helping you with your Cervical Screening Test.

## **What is the difference between a healthcare provider-collected and a self-collected test?**

A healthcare provider-collected test sample is taken from your cervix using a small brush. Your healthcare provider will use a device called a 'speculum' to access your cervix — the organ that connects the vagina and the uterus (womb).

The self-collected test sample can be taken yourself from your vagina using a swab.

**The main difference between the testing methods is how they are tested at the pathology lab.**

The samples from both test types are tested for HPV. If HPV is found on a healthcare provider-collected test, the same sample can be used to investigate any cervical cell abnormalities. If HPV is found on a self-collected test sample, follow up testing will be required.

## **Is a self-collected sample as accurate as a healthcare provider-collected sample?**

A self-collected test is just as accurate and effective at finding HPV as a healthcare provider-collected sample.

The self-collected test sample only checks for HPV. If HPV is found, you will need to return for a healthcare provider-collected test to investigate further.

The healthcare provider-collected test sample is also checked for HPV. If HPV is found, the same test sample can be used to look for any further cervical cell changes.

## **Who can do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?**

Anyone eligible and due for their routine 5-yearly Cervical Screening Test can choose how their test is done. However, it's a good idea to talk to your healthcare provider about which option is best for you depending on your history and personal circumstances.

## **Do I have to self-collect? Can I still have my doctor or healthcare provider collect my sample?**

If you are asymptomatic (i.e. you have no symptoms of cervical cancer), the choice of how your Cervical Screening Test is done is completely up to you.

You can do the test yourself or you can continue having your healthcare provider do the test for you.

## **Can I self-collect if I think I have symptoms of cervical cancer?**

If you have symptoms of cervical cancer, you should speak to your healthcare provider. You will most likely be advised to have a healthcare provider-collected test along with an examination of your cervix. This is because the healthcare provider-collected test can be used to investigate more developed changes than the self-collected test.

Common symptoms of early cervical cancer include:

- unexpected vaginal bleeding — for example, between periods, after sex (sexual intercourse), or

after menopause

- heavier or longer periods than usual unusual vaginal discharge
- pelvic pain
- pain during sex

## ... getting a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

### Where can I get a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

Book in your Cervical Screening Test with your healthcare provider at:

- Your local doctor's (GP) clinic or practice
- 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
- A Refugee Health Service

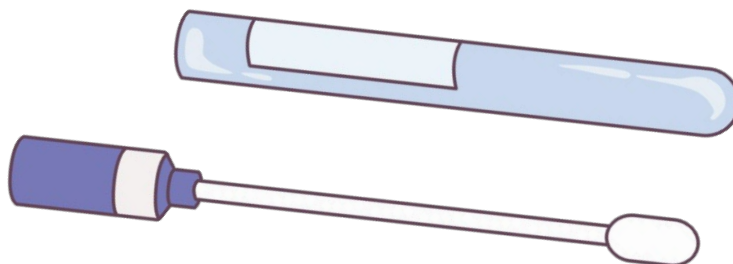
### How do I organise a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

Your healthcare provider, clinic or practice should already be offering the self-collection option and will have test swabs. To be safe, make sure you tell the health clinic or practice you'd like to do your own test when you make your appointment.

### Can I do a self-collect test when I have my period?

Yes, you can have a Cervical Screening Test at any point in your menstrual cycle. Please note that very heavy bleeding can interfere with the test results.

Many women and people with a cervix find it more comfortable to schedule their test for when they don't have their period.



## ...what happens during a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

### How do I do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

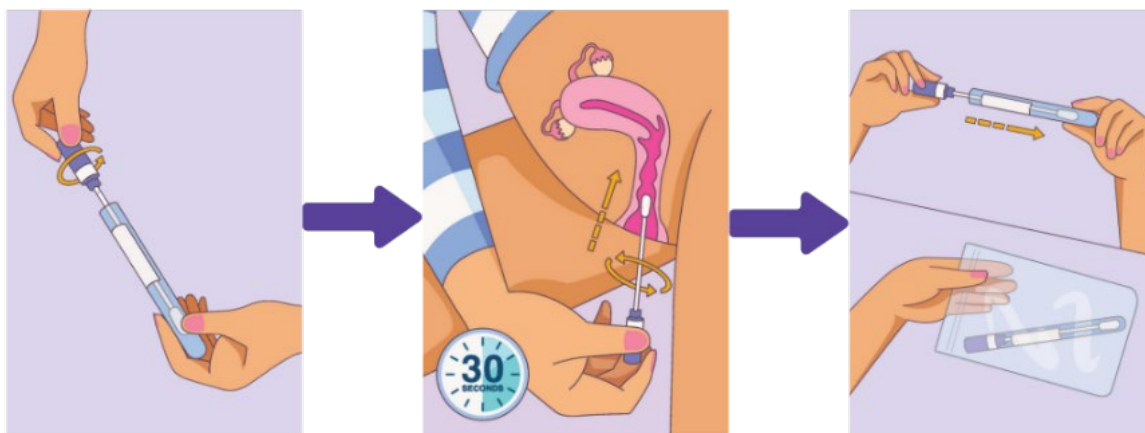
Talk to your healthcare provider about your cervical screening options. Make sure you let them know if you've experienced any symptoms or have any concerns.

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

### What happens during a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

To do the test:

1. Twist the cap and remove the swab from the tube
2. Hold on to the cap and do not touch the end of the swab
3. Insert the swab a few centimetres into your vagina (the swab will usually have a red line to mark how far — you do not need to reach your cervix)
4. Rotate the swab gently for 10–30 seconds
5. Gently remove the swab from your vagina
6. Place the swab back into the tube and screw the cap back on
7. Give the tube back to your healthcare provider



You may find it helpful if your doctor or nurse explains every step or you can look at a more detailed online instruction guide or video at [www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect).

### Does the doctor have to be present when I do a self-collect test?

No, your healthcare provider does not need to be with you when you do a self-collected test, unless it is what you want. Your healthcare provider will provide you with instructions on how to do your own test.

You can ask for help or assistance at any time. Your healthcare provider can also help you with the swab test too, with no need for a speculum.

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

The Cervical Screening Test detects HPV before it has the chance to develop into abnormal or cancerous cells. HPV can be detected from inside the vagina, so there is no need to access the cervix.

Your healthcare provider can give you the support you need to make sure the test is performed correctly.

## What if I can't do it right?

If you think you may have difficulty doing your own test but would prefer the test to be done without a speculum, you can also ask your healthcare provider to help you do a swab test.

You can look at an online instruction guide or video at [www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect) before the test to help you feel confident in how the test works.

## ...what happens after the test?

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

You're done. That's it for this round of cervical screening.

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

If your test results show HPV, your healthcare provider will give you guidance on next steps.

If you did your own test, you may need to come back for a healthcare provider-collected test. The healthcare provider-collected test can take a sample from your cervix to check if there are any further changes caused by the HPV.

HPV on your result does not mean you have cervical cancer. In most cases, you won't have any symptoms, and the HPV will clear up on its own, but it's important to keep an eye on it.





## ...something else?

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

Healthcare providers play a critical role in supporting cervical screening, including for the self-collect method.

Your doctor, nurse or healthcare worker can:

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

### Will self-collect test kits be mailed out to everyone?

The National Cervical Screening Program is not currently providing a home mailout program. You need to consult with a healthcare provider to have a self-collected test.

Your healthcare provider can give you the support you need to make sure the test is performed correctly and help you with your results and any further guidance.

### Can I take the self-collected Cervical Screening Test home?

It is recommended self-collected Cervical Screening Tests be done in the practice or clinic during a consultation with a healthcare provider. This is important to make sure you have the right support, and the test is performed correctly.

A healthcare provider can also explain to you what your results may mean, support you in any follow-up appointments you may need, and answer any questions you may have.

However, a self-collected test can be done in any setting that your healthcare provider believes is appropriate for your circumstances.

If you and your healthcare provider agree the test can be done at home, they will need to provide you with the test swab and details on how the test will be sent to the pathology lab.

