

NATIONAL
**CERVICAL
SCREENING**
PROGRAM
A joint Australian, state and
territory government program



CERVICAL SCREENING YOUR WAY



A guide to choosing the right screening option for you

WHAT IS CERVICAL SCREENING?

A Cervical Screening Test is a simple health check for people who have a cervix. The cervix is a small part of your body just below the womb (uterus). Not everyone knows exactly where it is, and that's okay. Your health worker can explain it in a way that feels comfortable for you.

The test looks for the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a common virus that most people will have at some point in their life. In most cases, you won't even know you have it.



HPV AND CERVICAL SCREENING

Usually, the body clears HPV on its own. Sometimes it stays in the body and can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. Most of those changes are not cancer.

There is a vaccine that protects against lots of common types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer, but it doesn't protect against every type.

The Cervical Screening Test checks for HPV or changes in your cervix and can find them early — long before you would notice anything yourself. If treatment is needed, it can usually be taken care of early, so it doesn't turn into something more serious.

Cervical cancer is one of the cancers we can often stop before it starts, and both the HPV vaccine and the Cervical Screening Test play an important part in protecting your health.

It's about looking after your health early and not waiting for something to feel wrong.





THIS IS YOUR BODY IT'S YOUR CHOICE

There is no “better” option — the best option is the one that feels right for you.



HOW TO SCREEN

You can choose how you would like to do your cervical screening.

THERE ARE 2 OPTIONS...

- 1. Screening with a healthcare worker** like a doctor, nurse or Aboriginal health worker (this is sometimes called a healthcare provider-collected test)
- 2. Self-collection** where you collect your own sample using a small, thin swab (this is sometimes also called a self-swab test)

Both options are safe and accurate ways to check for HPV, and both tests usually only take a few minutes.

If you're having any symptoms — like unusual bleeding — your healthcare worker might recommend that they do the test for you instead of self-collection.

Either way, you can yarn to your health worker, and they can talk you through what's best for your situation.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE OPTION THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU...

Some women feel more comfortable having a healthcare worker take the sample. Other women prefer self-collection because it feels more private or more in their control.

You might think about...

- If you're comfortable with someone examining your body
- Whether you would prefer a female healthcare worker
- If you feel confident to get the sample yourself
- Whether you have questions you want to talk through first

You can change your mind at any time. You can ask questions. You can ask for help and support. Your clinic will support whichever option you choose.



THE SCREENING

BEFORE SCREENING

You can book your screening wherever you usually go for your health care.

When you book, you can...

- Ask for a female doctor, nurse or health worker
- Ask about self-collection
- Ask any questions you have

There's nothing special you need to do to prepare. It can help to book your test when you're not having your period, but if you're unsure, your clinic can guide you.

If you feel nervous, that's normal. You can change your mind about how you want to screen when you arrive.

DURING SCREENING

If a doctor, nurse or health worker collects the sample...

You'll usually be asked to undress from the waist down. You lie on your back on a bed with your knees apart, and you can cover yourself with a sheet so you can stay as comfortable as possible.

The doctor, nurse or health worker gently places a small tool called a speculum into the vagina so they can see your cervix. They then use a soft brush to collect a small sample.

It might feel a little uncomfortable or unusual, but it shouldn't hurt. You can ask them to go slowly, explain what they are doing or stop at any time.

If you've had a difficult or uncomfortable experience before, you can let your health worker know. They can help make a plan that feels safer and more comfortable for you.



PROCESS



If you choose self-collection...

You'll collect your own sample using a small, thin swab.

Your healthcare worker will give you the swab to use. You can ask questions or ask for instructions on how to do the test before you start.

You do the test in a private space at the clinic. You place the swab into your vagina and swish it around for 20-30 seconds to collect a sample. It does not need to reach the cervix — there is a mark on the swab to show how far it needs to go.

When you're done, you return the swab to your healthcare worker.

Both options usually only take a few minutes. You're in control the whole time.

AFTER SCREENING

Your sample is sent to a lab to be checked for HPV.

Most people will receive a normal result, which means no HPV was found, and be invited to screen again in 5 years.

If HPV is found, it does not mean you have cancer. It just means the virus was picked up and your health worker may suggest some extra checks.

They will talk you through what happens next and support you along the way. You can always ask questions about your results.

Screening is about prevention. It helps find HPV and changes early, so they can be monitored or treated before they become serious.



YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING...



Is self-collection accurate?

Self-collection is a safe and accurate way to test for HPV. It's been carefully studied and approved for use in Australia. Both options work well. The best option is the one that feels right for you.

Will screening hurt?

Screening might feel a little uncomfortable or unusual, but it shouldn't be painful. If you choose to have a healthcare worker collect your sample you can ask them to go slowly, explain what they're doing or stop at any time. If you're not confident about doing the test yourself, you can ask for help with doing a self-collected test. You're in control.

If something is found, does it mean I have cancer?

If HPV is found, it doesn't mean you have cancer. It means you'll need some follow-up tests or a closer look to see if the HPV has caused any cell changes. Finding changes early gives you more options and a better chance of staying well.

Can I ask for a female doctor or nurse?

Yes. You can ask for a female doctor, nurse or health worker if that makes you feel more comfortable. If one isn't available straight away, you can ask when one will be available. You deserve to feel safe and respected.

Can I choose how I screen?

Yes. You can choose between screening with a doctor, nurse or health worker, or doing the test yourself. Both options are safe and effective. The best option is the one that feels right to you. In some cases, like if you have any unusual symptoms, your health worker might recommend they do the test or another doctor or nurse does it.

Can I change my mind?

Yes. You can decide to stop the test, ask for more information, or choose a different option at any time. You can also ask for help doing a self-collected test.





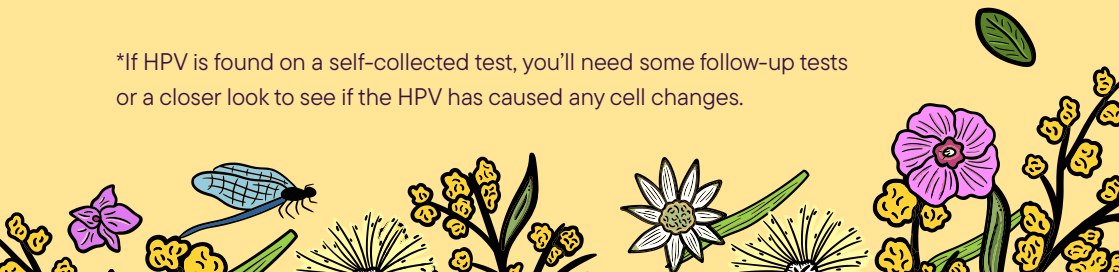


YOUR CHOICE YOUR POWER



	SCREENING WITH A HEALTHCARE WORKER	SELF-COLLECTION
Who collects the sample?	Doctor, nurse or health worker	You
Where does it happen?	In a clinic room	In a private space at the clinic
What tool is used?	Small speculum and soft brush	Small, soft, thin swab
Does it reach the cervix?	✓	✗
How long does it take?	A few minutes	A minute
Is it accurate at detecting HPV?*	✓	✓
Is it your choice?	✓	✓
Does it detect the changes HPV might have caused?	✓	✗

*If HPV is found on a self-collected test, you'll need some follow-up tests or a closer look to see if the HPV has caused any cell changes.



ONE SMALL SWISH EVERY 5 YEARS COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

If you're a woman, sistergirl or brotherboy with a cervix aged 25 to 74, you can book your cervical screening wherever you usually go for your health business.

🔗 health.gov.au/cervical-screening



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We acknowledge the wisdom, resilience and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We especially honour the important role of women, girls, and people with a cervix in our communities — including mothers, aunties, sisters and cousins as leaders, caregivers and custodians of knowledge. From the ocean to the outback, we thank them for the essential role they play in our cultures.

Artwork and illustrations by proud Bundjalung and South Sea Islander woman Kimberly Engwicht.

