

Cervical Screening Test (CST)- the new Pap Smear

What is a Cervical Screening Test?

The Cervical Screening Test replaced the Pap Smear in late 2017.

The Cervical Screening Test looks for the cause of most cervical cancer: a common infection called the human papilloma virus (HPV).

The test itself is collected in the same way as the Pap Smear and is carried out by a trained doctor or nurse. It may feel a bit strange but it should not be painful.

As of July 2022, everyone in Australia is now able to self-collect their own vaginal sample to test for HPV. This must be done under the supervision of a healthcare professional who also offers cervical screening tests. This means you take a swab of your cervix yourself, in private at a clinic after talking with your doctor.

Speak to your doctor or nurse to find out if self-collection is the right test for you.

Who should have a Cervical Screening Test?

Everyone with a cervix aged 25–74 who has ever been sexually active should have a Cervical Screening Test at least every five years.

Your first Cervical Screening Test is due at aged 25, or two years after your last Pap Smear.

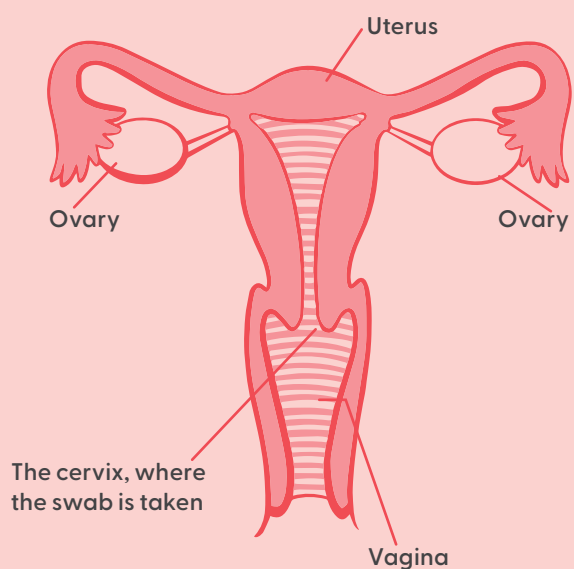
If you are having symptoms such as bleeding after sex or bleeding in between a period or any bleeding after menopause, make an appointment with a doctor to have your symptoms investigated. Don't wait until your next Cervical Screening Test.

What happens at a CST appointment?

The clinician (either a doctor or a nurse), will ask you to lie down on your back on the clinic bed and will give you a sheet to place over your pelvis. The clinician will use a device called a speculum and will take a swab of your cervix. This might feel a little strange or uncomfortable but it shouldn't hurt.

If you have chosen self-collection, the clinician will give you instructions on how to take the sample. Usually you will insert the swab into your vagina and rotate it.

This is the female reproductive system (internal)



What is HPV?

HPV is a common infection easily passed on through sexual activity.

Most HPV infections are usually naturally cleared by the body's immune system over a period of one to five years without causing any problems. This usually takes over 10 years.

Vaccination to help protect against several strains of HPV was introduced into Australian vaccination programs in 2007. This has significantly lowered the rate of problems caused by HPV.

But because the HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer it is important to continue regular screening even if you have received a full course of the vaccine.

Although HPV is an infection, it is not something that needs treating with antibiotics and any sexual partners do not need testing or treating.

Cervical Screening Results

Normal

If your Cervical Screening Test result is normal, we will let you know and schedule a reminder for you to return for routine screening in 5 years. You will also get a letter a few months before your next test is due from the National Cancer Screening Register (just remember to keep your address up-to-date with Medicare).

HPV detected - Repeat test in twelve months

If you have been advised to repeat your cervical screening test in 12 months, this is because HPV was detected on your test.

Additional tests will have automatically been done on your sample at the laboratory to check on the cells of your cervix. This testing indicates that you are not at higher risk of having a serious abnormality and that you can safely wait to repeat your test in 12 months.

When your Cervical Screening Test is repeated in 12 months, HPV may no longer be present and you can safely move to five yearly screening.

Referral for colposcopy (procedure)

Sometimes your result may indicate that you should be referred for colposcopy. A colposcopy is a procedure that feels like having a Cervical Screening Test and involves a doctor looking at the cells of the cervix more closely under magnification. This does not mean you have cervical cancer. It means that either:

- A type of HPV was found that needs further investigation,

OR

- The test found changing cells that may need treatment.

If you need a colposcopy then we will help you organise one, usually by referring you to a gynaecologist (women's health specialist doctor).

It is very important to attend your appointments for further investigation.

How do I find out more or book a CST?

For questions or to book a cervical screening test, please contact your nearest clinic or you can book a Cervical Screening Test on the Family Planning Tasmania website.

Contact details and bookings are available here:



[fpt.org.au](https://www.fpt.org.au)

For more information, support and advice visit www.fpt.org.au

FPT acknowledges the contribution of FPV in the development of this fact sheet

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