

# Cervical Screening saves lives!

**Empower yourself.**

**Protect your future.**

**If you haven't had yours, book now,** protect yourself and help prevent cervical cancer.



**Cervical screening saves lives.** We know it's not always the easiest of tests for you to have, but it helps prevent cervical cancer.


Screening finds abnormal cells so they can be removed before they become cancer. This guide provides you with information to help you decide what is right for you.

# What is stopping you from having your cervical screening?

Here are some of the barriers patients in Bromley have experienced.




**I have experienced sexual abuse in the past and cervical screening is very difficult for me**



**I identify as a trans man and would like more information**




**The screening is uncomfortable which puts me off booking an appointment**





**English isn't my first language and I find it hard to understand the nurse, which puts me off booking**



**I just get really anxious about it**



**I think I am due, but don't know how to check or book**



Sometimes just talking through the screening process with the nurse can help. If you haven't had cervical screening before, are a virgin or simply want more information, the nurses can advise, answer your questions, and reassure you. If you think this would help, book an appointment with the practice nurse to discuss your worries. Afterwards, if you feel ready, they can do your screening test for you. If you do not want it, that is okay too.



Read our top tips on preparing for your test on page 7

## When am I due my cervical screening and how will I be notified?

If you have a cervix and are aged between 25 and 64, then you are eligible for cervical screening. If you are registered as female with a GP, you will automatically receive an invitation when you are due. If you are a transgender man or non-binary with a cervix and registered with a gender marker other than female, you can choose to opt in to receive routine automatic invitations to cervical screening if you wish. This can be done by contacting your GP directly. Make sure your GP practice has your current address.

You'll be invited for screening every 5 years from when you are 25 to 64 years old. You will get your first invitation a few months before you turn 25. You may be invited more regularly if you have an abnormal test. If you are 65 or older, you will only be invited if a recent test was abnormal.

If you think you are due and haven't received a letter, or have missed an appointment, give your GP practice a call to check. If you have missed your last screening test, you do not have to wait for another letter to book.





## How to book an appointment

If you receive an invitation letter, call your GP practice to book. Some practices let you book through the NHS App. You can choose to have a female health practitioner undertake your screening.

## First time having a cervical screening test

Having your cervical screening for the first time can be scary, but we are here to help. Visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) to read more about the test and what to expect. If you have any questions, please book an appointment with your practice nurse. No question is too big or too small or considered silly.

## Periods and cervical screening

Please do not book your cervical screening when you are on your period. Please try and avoid two days before and after your period too. This is because it can make it more difficult to get an adequate sample.

## Pregnancy and cervical screening

If you are called for your routine cervical screening and are pregnant, please inform your practice and delay having it done until 12 weeks after you have given birth. This is because being pregnant can make it harder to get a clear result and not because it is harmful. If you have previously had an abnormal result, it might be necessary for you to have a cervical screen when pregnant.





## Screening and HPV vaccine

It is still important to attend your cervical screening when invited, even if you have had the HPV vaccine.

## Pain

There are lots of reasons why having cervical screening can be painful, sometimes even unbearable.

Please don't let pain be the reason why you don't have your cervical screening test. The nurse will talk you through the process and help you to feel relaxed and more comfortable. They are very experienced.

There are lots of reasons you might experience pain such as:

- Involuntary spasm of vaginal muscles/unable to relax
- Endometriosis
- Vaginal dryness
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)



## Anxiety and worry

Cervical screening is an intimate process, but don't let worry, anxiety or embarrassment be the reason why you don't get screened.

There are lots of reasons that you might feel anxious such as:

- Health anxiety
- Fear of an unknown situation
- Body dysmorphia
- Previous experience of sexual abuse
- A previous bad experience of cervical screening
- Social anxiety

Talk to the nurse about how you feel before the test. They will do anything they can to help you feel comfortable and less anxious.

## Previous sexual abuse or FGM

If you have experienced sexual violence and abuse, or you have undergone FGM, we appreciate that coming for your cervical screening might be very upsetting and, in some cases, a traumatic experience.

Talk to your nurse before the screening and explain your concerns. They are very experienced and can help you. They may be able to refer you to the hospital specialist services to have your cervical screening if you would prefer.

If you do not feel comfortable going to your GP for screening, you can contact MY BODY BACK PROJECT who offer cervical screening for those who have suffered sexual abuse. Appointments last an hour. Please scan the QR code on the back page for website links.

## Trans-men and non-binary

If you identify as a transgender man or non-binary and still have your cervix, you should still be able to access cervical screening.

You can choose to have your screening at your GP practice, or you can book through the CLINIQ sexual health service located at King's College Hospital. The service offers cervical screening and is run by a team of trans and trans friendly professionals. Please scan the QR code on the back page for website links.

Please be aware that if you are of screening age and have a cervix but are registered with a gender marker other than female you will not automatically receive cervical screening invitations. However, you can choose to opt in to receive routine automatic invitations if you wish. This can be done by contacting your GP directly.





# Top tips to help you through your cervical screening test



## Booking

- Book a longer appointment so you don't feel rushed and can talk about anything that is worrying you.
- Book it for a day when you have plenty of time to get there and are not rushing afterwards.
- If English is not your first language, ask for a translator, or bring a friend to help translate.
- If you suffer from vaginal dryness, ask the doctor about treatment options before booking your screening.
- Write down your concerns and bring them with you to help you collect your thoughts. If you don't want to talk, you can hand the paper to the nurse.
- Wear comfortable clothes such as a long skirt or dress to give you more privacy during the test.
- Ask the nurse about different positions to have your screening test done in.
- Arrange for someone to come with you for support.
- Ask for a different speculum size (A plastic cylinder with a round end) if possible.
- If you are worried about pain or feel anxious, tell the nurse before the test starts and they will help you to feel more relaxed. Remember, you are in control.

## During

- If it is too painful or causing anxiety, you can ask for the test to stop, or to be paused.
- Listen to some music or a podcast for distraction and relaxation.
- Do some breathing exercises to help you relax during the test

## Before

- Empty your bladder.
- Practice breathing exercises to help you relax.
- Think about bringing some music or a podcast to listen to for distraction and relaxation.

## After

- Do something nice afterwards to give yourself a treat. You deserve it!

## Translations

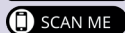
This information is available in other languages and formats. Your GP practice can also book a translator to help you at your appointment and explain what is happening.

## More information

If you can't find the answers to your questions, please book an appointment with your practice nurse. They will help reassure you and give you as much information as you need. Never worry about asking for help. The most important thing is to support you to have your cervical screening.

**Remember screening helps save lives.** If you are overdue your cervical screening, book yours today.

If you want to find out more about cervical screening, visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or scan the QR code here:



**My next cervical screening is due on:**