



## ECCA

## CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

The ECCA supports the reduction of cervical cancer in Europe by promoting awareness of cervical cancer and the means by which it can be prevented. Drawing upon the expertise of researchers, clinicians and public health organisations from across Europe, the ECCA has prepared:

The leaflets

- Cervical cancer screening
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and cervical cancer
- Follow-up and treatment of an abnormal cervical smear
- Vaccination against HPV and cervical cancer

The booklets

- Everything you need to know to help you avoid cervical cancer
- Everything you need to know if you have an abnormal cervical smear

For additional information

📄 Visit our website: [www.ecca.info](http://www.ecca.info)

✉ Send your questions to: [info@ecca.info](mailto:info@ecca.info)

- Cervical cancer develops in the cervix, the part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. It occurs when cells of the cervix become abnormal and start to grow in an uncontrolled fashion.
- Cervical screening is designed to find abnormal cervical cells in the early stages when they can be easily removed so they do not develop into cervical cancer. Cervical screening is currently done using the cervical smear test.
- All women from 25 and 60 years of age should be screened every three to five years, depending on their age and previous smear results.
- Vaccination is now available to reduce the risk of cervical cancer, but it will not eliminate need for screening. Together, screening and vaccination will offer the most effective protection against cervical cancer.

- What is cervical cancer?
- Why get screened?
- Who should be screened?
- What do you need to do?
- How does screening work?
- Normal cervical smear result?
- Abnormal cervical smear result?
- Is screening reliable?

## CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

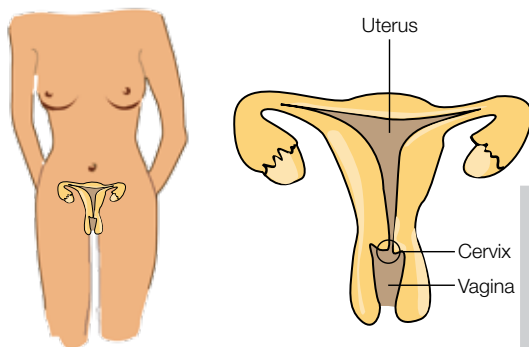
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## What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer develops in the cervix, the part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. It occurs when cells of the cervix become abnormal and start to grow in an uncontrolled fashion.

It takes many years for abnormal cells in the early stages to progress to cervical cancer. Fortunately, these stages are easy to treat. However, they show no obvious signs and can only be found by screening.



## Why get screened?

Cervical screening is designed to find abnormal cervical cells in the early stages when they can be removed so they do not develop into cervical cancer. Once cancer has developed, treatment becomes much more difficult and less successful.

## Who should be screened?

All women from 25 to 60 years of age should be screened.

## Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is caused by certain types of HPV. There are more than 100 types of HPV and about 15 of these can cause cervical cancer.

Most adults will have had a HPV infection at some time in their lives, but it usually disappears on its own without any problem. If the HPV does not disappear, it can increase the risk of cervical cancer developing.

Women who are 25 to 44 years of age should be screened once every 3 years, while those from 45 to 60 years of age should be screened once every 5 years, after two consecutive negatives. Cervical screening provides the best protection if repeated regularly.

## What do you need to do?

The rollout of the Irish National Cancer Screening Service is due to begin in 2007: until your region is covered you will need to make an appointment for a smear test with your general practice/well woman clinic or family planning clinic.

For women who live in the mid-west area; the Irish Cervical Screening Programme currently offers free smear tests to women aged 25-60 years. If you live in the mid-west area contact the Irish Cervical Screening Programme (1800 252 600) to see if you are registered. If you are registered, you will be sent a letter advising you when to make an appointment with a registered smear taker (family doctor or practice nurse).

You should try to arrange your appointment during the middle of your menstrual cycle, avoid using any treatments inside your vagina for 2 days before your appointment and avoid having sex the night before.

## How does screening work?

Cervical screening is done using the cervical smear test which is taken at your GP practice or family planning clinic. This is a simple procedure that only takes about ten minutes and involves little more than a vaginal examination. During the examination, a sample of



Vaccination is now available to protect women against the 2 most common types of HPV, types 16 & 18, which cause about 2/3rds of all cervical cancers and many abnormal Pap tests. The current vaccines will be most effective if given before you have had HPV 16 or 18, and they will not effectively protect against all HPV types. Therefore, even if you have been vaccinated, you should still be screened. Together, screening and vaccination will offer the most effective protection against cervical cancer.



cells will be taken from your cervix using a small spatula or brush.

These cells will be sent to the laboratory, where they will be examined under a microscope to search for any abnormal cells.

## Normal cervical smear result?

Most women will have a normal result.

In this case, your risk for cervical cancer is low and you should continue your regular screening.

## Abnormal cervical smear result?

Some women will have an abnormal result. This simply means that some abnormal cervical cells have been found on the cervical smear test; it is very rare for cancer to be detected.

Depending on the result, you will be advised to have one of the following:

- another cervical smear in three to six months
- a test for the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), the virus that can cause cervical cancer,
- a colposcopy, which is a procedure that allows the doctor to examine your cervix more closely.

Certain abnormalities should be removed so that they will not develop into cancer. This usually requires only a simple procedure that can be done in the hospital gynaecology outpatient clinic. Treatment rarely affects your sex life or ability to have children.

## Is screening reliable?

No screening test is perfect and the cervical smear test may miss some cases of disease. This is why you need to be screened regularly, so that anything that has been missed on one screen may be picked-up at the next, before it has time to progress.

High-quality, organised screening programs are very effective, but will not prevent all cervical cancers.