

Changes to cervical screening intervals: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is changing?

At the moment in England, women and people with a cervix aged 25-49 years are routinely invited for cervical screening every 3 years.

But **now we have a better test for HPV**, the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC) has recommended that those testing negative won't need to come for a cervical screening quite so often – every 5 years instead of every 3. If your cervical screening shows you have HPV, you may be invited for more frequent screenings to monitor any cell changes.

2. Why are cervical screening intervals changing?

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) causes nearly all cervical cancers. We now use a test which is more sensitive and accurate than the previous method (smear test) to look for HPV in your sample.

This helps us offer a more personalised approach by finding out who is at higher risk of developing the cervical cell changes that over time, if left untreated, could lead to cervical cancer.

This change from 3 to 5 yearly screening is backed by robust scientific evidence – studies have shown that if you test negative for HPV you are extremely unlikely to go on to develop cervical cancer within the next 10 years. So now we have this better test, you don't need to be screened as often if you don't have HPV.

3. When is this change happening?

This is happening from 1 July 2025 – so anyone who is screened on or after this date, and tests negative for HPV, will move to 5 yearly screening unless previous screening history suggests they should be screened more regularly.

If you are being screened before 1 July 2025 and test negative for HPV, you will stay on the current 3 yearly recall until you're next due a screen in 3 years' time.

4. Will everyone move onto this new 5 yearly screening pathway automatically?

No. Next test due dates will not be changed retrospectively; you will be invited at the interval in which you were advised of at the time of your last test.

Only those who attend cervical screening on or after 1 July, and meet the clinical criteria, will have their next test due date set at 5 years. NHS England made this decision based on clinical advice from experts. Those aged 50 to 64 are already invited every 5 years.

5. So will everyone aged 25-49 move to a 5-year screening if they test negative after 1 July?

No, not everyone. If your test result is negative but your last test (taken within the last 5 years) showed an HPV positive result, you will still be invited for screening in 3 years' time so that we can continue to monitor your HPV status.

If you test negative for HPV at that next test, then you'll move to 5-year screening.

6. What happens if I test positive for HPV?

It's important to remember that having HPV does not mean that you have or will develop cervical cancer. It is a common virus that most people will have at some point in their life without knowing, which usually goes away on its own. If HPV is found in your sample and there are no cell changes, you are invited for screening again in 1 year.

If cell changes are found alongside HPV, you are referred directly to a hospital clinic for a colposcopy to check the cervix more closely. Further follow up and treatment will depend on the colposcopy findings.

7. What happens if I test negative for HPV?

For most people, their screening result is normal, with no HPV detected. Screening results letters for HPV negative samples taken on or after 1st July 2025 will clearly state the date that the participant's next test will be due, which will be in 5 years.

However, if a participant tests negative for HPV, but they had a positive HPV result within the last 5 years that has not already been followed up by a negative HPV test, they will be invited for screening in 3 years.

The date of their next test will be stated in their results letter. If this test is negative, they will then be due in 5 years. This is so that we can make sure they are still HPV negative before they move to the longer interval, having had HPV in the recent past.

8. I'm currently having treatment following a colposcopy, will I be put on 5-yearly screening?

Not immediately. You will be followed up according to the reason for your treatment. Once this is completed successfully, you will move to 5 yearly screening.

9. I've had cervical cancer in the past, will I be put on 5-yearly screening?

Most people diagnosed with cervical cancer receive follow-up care and monitoring by their hospital cancer team instead of returning to regular screening.

Those people who are diagnosed with very early cervical cancer and remain in the Cervical Screening Programme will go onto 5-year routine recall once their 10 year follow up is successfully completed.

10. I've never been for cervical screening, even though I am eligible. Will I now move onto a 5-year recall if I do decide to come for a test?

Yes, if you come for screening and test negative for HPV you will be invited again in 5 years' time.

11. I'm 25 and have been invited for my first ever screening. Will I automatically go straight onto a 5-year recall if I test negative?

Yes, if you test negative for HPV at your first ever test aged 25, your next test date will be in 5 years' time.

12. I haven't been for screening for a long time, I'm overdue – will I now automatically be screened every 5 years?

Only those whose most recent test result was reported as HPV negative, and where they have no recent HPV positive history, will move to 5 yearly screening.

If we don't have an HPV test result for you (because your last screening took place before the NHS started using the HPV test in 2019), your next test due date will remain set at 3 years until you come for screening, where we can check for HPV.

If you missed your last cervical screening, even if it was weeks, months or years ago, book an appointment with your GP practice now – it is not too late.

13. I've heard that I will be invited for my cervical screening through the app, but I don't have it/don't want it, what should I do?

From June 2025, you can receive cervical screening communications via the NHS App. To benefit from this, please download the NHS app and make sure your notifications are switched on.

If you don't wish to use the App, we'll attempt to contact you by text message. If we can't reach you through these methods, we will send a hard-copy letter through the post, so don't worry, you won't miss an invitation. If you have any issues with the NHS app, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/nhs-app-help-and-support/>

14. I've had an HPV vaccination, do I still need to have cervical screening

Even if you've been vaccinated it's important that you attend your cervical screening appointment when invited because the HPV vaccine doesn't protect against all strains of HPV.

15. What happens if I move GP surgery before my next screening appointment is due?

As all cervical screening communications are sent from a central secure database, your information will be updated automatically when you register with a new GP Practice. So as long as you are registered, you will get your invitations.