

# Cervical screening: your results explained



**Cervical  
Screening**

This leaflet will explain the results of your cervical screening test which is designed to pick up any changes in cells on the cervix (lower part of the womb) so they can be easily and effectively monitored or treated.



## What causes these changes?

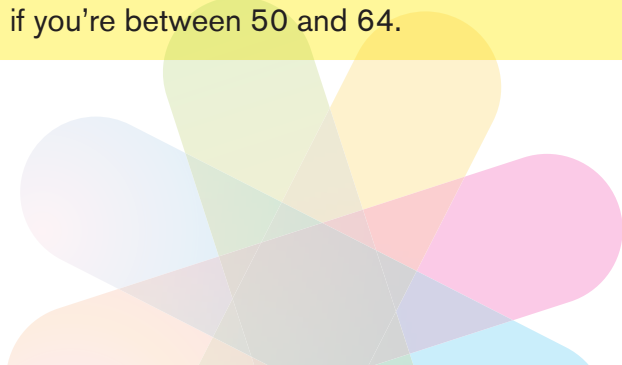
Most changes are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) which can damage the cells on the cervix. HPV is mainly spread by skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. There are usually no symptoms so people don't even know they have it.

There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Most are harmless but a small number of 'high risk' types are known to cause cancer. The body's immune system will usually fight them off naturally, but if the virus persists it can damage the cells of the cervix.



## My result has come back as 'normal' – what does this mean?

More than 90 out of every 100 women screened get a normal result. This means that your cells showed no abnormal changes. You will be invited for screening again in three years if you're aged 25–49, or five years if you're between 50 and 64.





## What does the result 'inadequate' mean?

This means that there were not enough cells in the sample. This is not unusual and occurs in about 3 in every 100 tests. You will be asked back for a repeat test in three months.



## I've received an 'abnormal result' – what does this mean?

This means that changes have been found in your cells. This happens in about 7 in every 100 women screened. What happens next will depend on whether your changes are mild, moderate or severe. Your doctor or nurse will explain this to you in detail.



## I have mild or borderline changes – what now?

This is not cancer and in most cases does not lead to cancer. The sample you submitted for cervical screening will also be tested for HPV. You will not need to submit another sample.

- If HPV is found, you will be referred for a more detailed examination of the cervix called a colposcopy.
- If HPV is not found, your risk of cancer is extremely small and you will not need any further follow-up at this time. You will be invited for screening again in three or five years time.



## I have moderate or severe changes – what happens next?

It is still unlikely that this is cancer. To decide whether or not you need treatment, a colposcopy will be carried out. Any treatment you may require is usually simple and is carried out under a local

anaesthetic as an outpatient at your local hospital. It is important that these changes are checked and treated now to avoid them becoming more serious in the future.



## What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a simple examination of the cervix using a colposcope (a type of magnifying glass). It lets the doctor or specialist nurse look more closely at the changes on your cervix to decide if you need treatment. The examination is similar to the screening test.

Colposcopy can be done safely during pregnancy and will not affect delivery of your baby, or your ability to get pregnant in the future.



## What about treatment?

Treatment involves removing the area of affected cells from the cervix and the process is nearly always successful. The choice of treatment and any risks involved will be discussed with you in detail at the clinic. In some cases you may be asked to come back to the clinic for further colposcopy examinations.

Around six months after treatment you will be offered cervical screening again to check that your treatment has been successful. If your result is normal or shows mild or borderline changes, your sample will be tested for HPV. This is known as the **test of cure**. If this test comes back negative for HPV, you will be at very low risk of ongoing cervical disease at that point in time, but it will be important that you attend for screening again in three years time.

If the cervical screening result shows moderate or severe changes, or if the HPV test comes back positive, you will be referred for another colposcopy.

In the unlikely event that you do have cervical cancer, you will be referred to the appropriate specialists and services.



## What about sex and pregnancy?

The hormones produced during pregnancy make treatment more difficult. If you're not already pregnant, it's important not to become pregnant until the cell changes are dealt with.

Sex does not worsen cell changes and you cannot pass on affected abnormal cells to your partner, but you should use an effective contraception.





## Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about your screening result, you can speak to your GP or the person who carried out your test. Make sure your GP always has your current address.

For more information,  
or this leaflet in other languages or formats, visit:

**[www.cancerscreening.hscni.net](http://www.cancerscreening.hscni.net)**



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