



Patient Information Leaflet

Cervical Screening



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What is Cervical Screening?

Cervical screening is not a test for diagnosing cervical cancer. It is a test to check the health of the cervix, which is the lower part of the womb (often called the neck of the womb). This test detects pre cancer changes in the cervix; and may also be called a “Thin Prep” smear test..

For many women the test results show that everything is fine. But for 1 in 20 women this test shows changes in cells that can be caused by many things. Most of these changes will not lead to cervical cancer.

Why do I need cervical screening?

Cervical cancer can often be prevented. The signs that it may develop can be spotted early on so it can be stopped before it even gets started.

In Kuwait, it is the 5th most common cancer in women. However, many of those who develop it have not been screened regularly. Not going for cervical screening is one of the biggest risk factors for developing cervical cancer.

Should all women have the test?

We offer the test to all women aged between 20 and 64 but cervical cancer is more common if you:

- Smoke
- First slept with a partner at an early age
- Have slept with several partners
- Take immunosuppressant drugs (for example, after an organ transplant).
- If you have passed the menopause, you still need to be tested to check that your cervix is healthy.

Ask your doctor for advice if you:

- Have had a hysterectomy
- Are over 65
- Have never slept with a partner or
- You are not sure whether you still need to be tested

Who will carry out the test?

The female doctor or nurse will carry out your test.

Will I have to undress?

We will ask you to undress from the waist down, but if you wear full skirt, you will not have to remove it.

What happens during the test?

A female doctor will ask you to lie down on a couch. They will then gently put a small instrument, called a speculum, into your vagina to hold it open. Then, they will wipe a small spatula or a brush-like device over the cervix to pick up some cells. They will transfer these cells onto a slide or into a small container of liquid, and send it away for the cells to be examined under a microscope. The test takes just a few minutes.

Does the test hurt?

You might experience some discomfort – try to relax by taking, slow, deep breaths as it may hurt more if you are tense. If it is painful, tell the doctor or nurse straightaway as they maybe able to reduce your discomfort.

Is there anything I should do before the test?

You cannot be tested during your period so make sure you get an appointment before or after your period is due. The best time is in the middle of your cycle.

Special Precautions

If when you sleep with your partner use spermicide, a barrier method of contraception or a lubricant jelly, you should not use these for 24 hours before the test as the chemicals they contain may affect the test.

When do I get my results?

When you have the test, the doctor will tell you how, where and approximately when you will get your results. Make sure you have received this information before you leave the clinic.

How reliable is cervical screening?

Early detection and treatment can prevent around 75% of cancers developing but like other screening tests, it is not perfect.

It may not always detect early cell changes that may lead to cancer. Abnormal cells in your test may not be recognized because:

- Sometimes they do not look much different from normal cells;
- There maybe very few abnormal cells in the test;
- The person reading your test may miss the abnormality (this happens occasionally, no matter how experienced the reader is).

About 1 in 20 tests have to be taken again because:

- You may have an infection which needs treating;
- The cervical cells in your test may have been hidden by blood or mucus;
- There may not have been enough cervical cells in your test to give an accurate assessment;

If you have any unusual symptoms such as bleeding after sex or between periods, you should see your doctor.

What does it mean if I am called back?

Only rarely does it mean that you have cancer. It might simply mean that your sample did not show up clearly and that we need to take another test. This is called an “unsatisfactory result”.

On the other hand, your result could identify some small changes in the cells of the cervix. If abnormal changes (known as dyskaryosis), you will have what is called a “abnormal result”. This is not necessarily cancer.

However, sometimes cancer will be found when an abnormal test is investigated further.

Can anything be done about abnormal changes?

Yes. Your doctor will explain what needs to be done.

They may ask you to come back for more cervical screening tests because the abnormal cells may return to normal by themselves. However, they may ask you to return to hospital for a closer examination which is called ‘colposcopy’ using a microscope in clinic. Treatment, if it is needed, is a minor procedure using a microscope in clinic.

Can cervical screening prevent cancer?

Regular cervical screening is the best way to detect changes to the cervix early. Early detection and treatment can prevent cancer developing in around 75% of cases.

The Best Protection is Early Detection

Source and Acknowledgement:

This information is based on the NHS Cervical Screening Program.