

"Knowledge is hope, into the future"

Women living in WA come together to talk and become more aware of how to prevent cervical cancer. They see this message being very important to all the women and their families in the communities. As they travel back to their communities they talk about how to spread the message so that other women know the importance of having regular cervical screening. Sadly the empty space is from the women who have since died from cervical cancer because they didn't have regular cervical screening. The woman is dancing because the human papillomavirus (HPV), which caused her abnormal cervical cell changes, was found early. If she didn't have regular screening, and left the abnormal cells untreated, it may have led to cervical cancer.

By Neville Byrnie

About the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program (WACCPP)

The WACCPP was established in 1992 as part of the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSPP).

The WACCPP aims to reduce the number of new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed (incidence) as well as deaths (mortality) from cervical cancer amongst WA women.

In WA, Aboriginal women are more likely to develop and die from cervical cancer than non-Aboriginal women.

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable of all cancers. The greatest risk factor for cervical cancer is not participating in regular cervical screening.

This flipchart was developed as an educational tool to raise awareness amongst Aboriginal women to encourage the uptake of cervical screening.

Tips for healthcare providers when using this flipchart:

- Adapt language used where possible to suit groups and/or individuals. This may include liaising with Aboriginal health workers and respected Aboriginal community members.
 - Create a secure environment.
 - Let women know that any question is important and cannot be asked (no question is silly).
 - Discuss confidentiality issues for both group and individual settings.
 - Encourage women to ask questions and to discuss the discussion.
 - Allow time for discussion and questions.
 - Have cervical screening equipment available for women to see and handle.
- The WACCPP can provide a number of supporting resources to be used in the delivery of cervical screening information. Please contact the WACCPP at cervicalscreening@health.wa.gov.au.

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Introduction – women's health check

As women we often neglect our own health needs, putting the needs of our families first. However, by allowing time to take care of ourselves and have a health check, we help our families by making sure we are well enough to take care of them.

A health check is also a great opportunity to talk with your healthcare provider about any questions or concerns you may have about your health.

Today we will be discussing one important health check – cervical screening.

We will talk about:

- How to reduce your risk of cervical cancer
- Why regular cervical screening is important and how the test is done
- Where you can go to have a Cervical Screening Test (CST)
- The option to collect your own sample

We will talk about the human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes most cervical cancer cases, and the HPV vaccine.

We will also talk about the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR), which holds all cervical test results of women who screen in Australia.

Before we start, we need to know where the cervix is located.

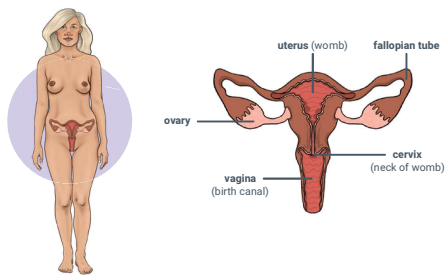


Women's health check



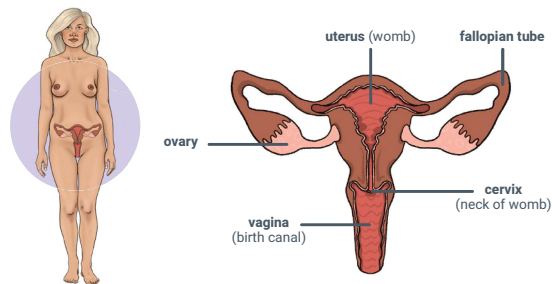
Where is the cervix?

The cervix is part of the reproductive system. It is the area that joins the top of the vagina and the lower part of the uterus (the womb). This is where the midwife or doctor checks when a woman is in labour to monitor how the labour is progressing (eg: number of centimetres dilated).



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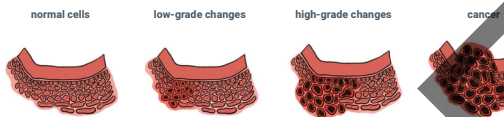
Where is the cervix?



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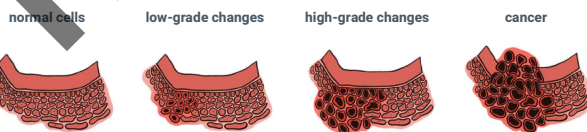
What is cervical cancer?

Our bodies are made up of billions of cells which grow and divide in a set, well-ordered way. If these cells grow and divide in an 'out of control'/'abnormal' way they can turn into cancer. Cervical cancer can develop in the cervix if abnormal cell changes are not found early and, if needed, treated. This process of cell changes to cervical cancer can take up to 10 to 15 years.



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What is cervical cancer?

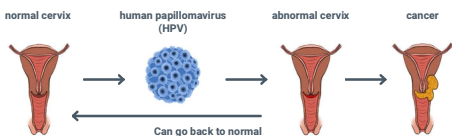


This process of cell changes to cervical cancer can take up to 10 to 15 years.

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What causes cervical cancer?

The main cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus, also known as HPV. HPV is a very common infection: most people will have this virus at some time in their lives. HPV that affects the cervix and the genitals is spread through any sexual contact. Both males and females can have HPV. Most people do not know that they have HPV as there are often no symptoms and the body's immune system usually clears the virus within one to two years. If the body does not clear HPV, it can cause cervical cell changes. If left undetected and/or untreated, these changes can develop into cervical cancer.

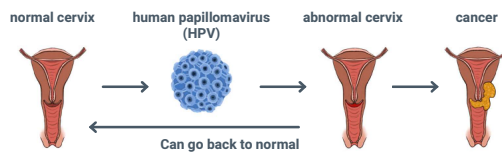


Most cases of HPV can be cleared by the body. But some persist and can lead to cancer.

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What causes cervical cancer?

The main cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus, also known as HPV.



Most cases of HPV can be cleared by the body. But some persist and can lead to cancer.

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How to prevent cervical cancer


The best way to prevent cervical cancer is to have regular cervical screening and, if appropriate, to have the HPV vaccine.

Women should have a Cervical Screening Test (CST) every five years and attend all follow-up and specialist appointments as recommended.


There are two options for your CST. You can have a healthcare provider collect your sample, or you can collect your own sample.

Cervical Screening Test (CST)


Option 1 Collected by your healthcare provider



Option 2 Collect your own sample



HPV vaccine




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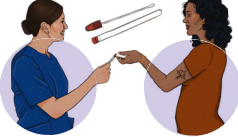
How to prevent cervical cancer

Cervical Screening Test (CST)


Option 1 Collected by your healthcare provider



Option 2 Collect your own sample



HPV vaccine



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HPV vaccine

The HPV vaccine can protect against certain types of HPV that cause most cervical cancer cases. The vaccine is provided free of charge at school as part of the National Immunisation Program for boys and girls.

It is recommended that all boys and girls aged 9 to 14 years be given two doses. If your child has not had two doses of the vaccine by the age of 15, speak with your school nurse or healthcare provider.

The HPV vaccine is also available for people over 15 years of age through a healthcare provider, but it is most effective when given before first sexual contact. There may be a fee for the vaccine if given out of school.

HPV-vaccinated women still need to have regular cervical screening as the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.



The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine



Why is regular cervical screening important?

Cervical cancer can be prevented. The biggest risk factor is not having regular cervical screening.

Through regular cervical screening, HPV and abnormal cell changes caused by HPV can be found early.

These cell changes can then be monitored and, if needed, treated to prevent cervical cancer.

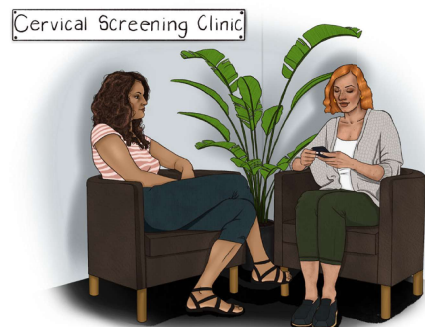
Cervical cancer can take up to 10 to 15 years to develop.

Early-stage cervical cancer often has no symptoms. This is why it is important to screen regularly and attend all follow-up appointments.



Why is regular cervical screening important?

The biggest risk factor for cervical cancer is not having regular cervical screening.



Who should have cervical screening?

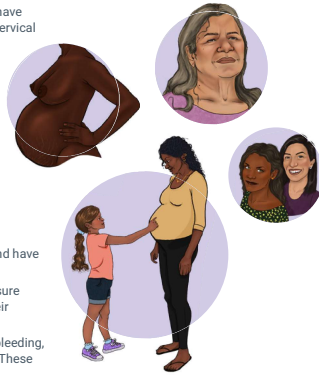
All women with a cervix aged 25 to 74 years who have ever had any sexual contact should have regular cervical screening.

This includes those who:

- Feel well and have no symptoms
- Are pregnant
- Have received the HPV vaccine
- Are going through menopause
- No longer have periods
- Have not had sexual contact for a long time
- Have only ever had one sexual partner
- Only have sex with women
- Are transgender, gender diverse or non-binary and have a cervix

Women who have had a hysterectomy and are unsure whether they still need to screen should talk to their healthcare provider.

Women with symptoms, such as unusual pain or bleeding, should see their healthcare provider immediately. These women can have a cervical test at any age.



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Who should have cervical screening?

All women with a cervix aged 25 to 74 years who have ever had any sexual contact should have regular cervical screening.



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Where can women go for a Cervical Screening Test (CST)?

Services that offer cervical screening may include:

- Aboriginal medical services
- Local medical services
- Women's health services
- Some community health services.



Note: Discuss with the group the available services and options in your community.

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Services that offer a Cervical Screening Test (CST)



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How is a Cervical Screening Test (CST) taken by a healthcare provider?

There are two options for having a CST. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect your sample.

You will be asked to undress from the waist down and to lie on a bed in a private room. You will be given a sheet to cover yourself, so you feel more comfortable.

The healthcare provider will place an instrument called a speculum into your vagina so that they can see your cervix. A small brush will then be used to collect a sample of cells from your cervix.

The sample collected will be placed from the device into a vial, labelled with your name and details, and sent to the laboratory for testing.

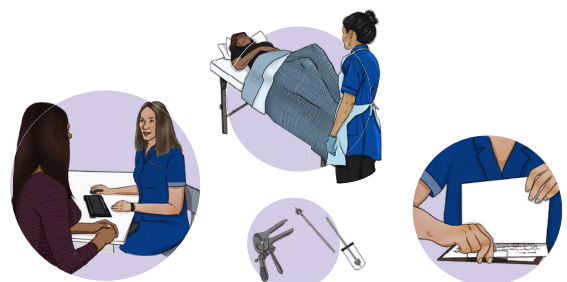
A CST may be uncomfortable but should not hurt. If you do feel any pain, let the healthcare provider know.

You can ask the healthcare provider to stop at any time.



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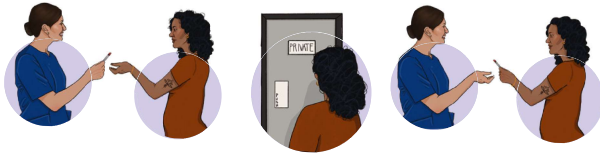
How is a Cervical Screening Test (CST) taken by a healthcare provider?



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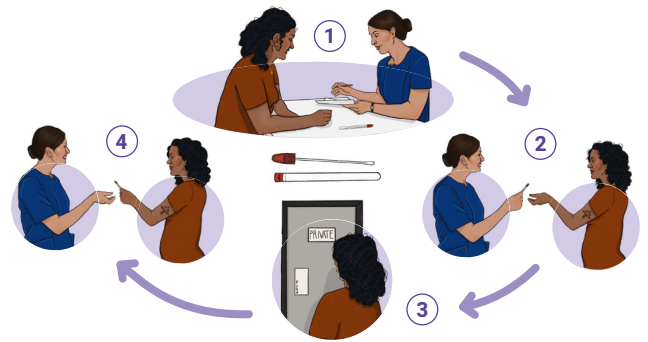
How do I collect my own Cervical Screening Test (CST) sample?

The other option for having a CST is to collect your own sample. Your healthcare provider will explain how to do the test and give you a swab. Using the swab, you will collect a sample from the vagina for HPV testing. A private room will be provided for you to collect your sample. Collecting your own CST sample should not hurt. When complete, your healthcare provider will send the sample to the laboratory for testing.



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How do I collect my own Cervical Screening Test (CST) sample?



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Cervical Screening Test (CST) results

If your sample is taken by a healthcare provider:

The sample is first tested for HPV

- If HPV is not found, you can return to screen in five years.
- If HPV is found, the cervical cells collected in the sample will then be checked for abnormal cell changes.

Your healthcare provider will discuss the next steps with you depending on the results.

If you collect your own sample:

The sample is tested for HPV only.

- If HPV is not found, you can return to screen in five years.
- If HPV is found, your healthcare provider will discuss the next steps with you. This may include returning to have a cervical sample collected by a healthcare provider to check for abnormal cell changes, or being referred to a specialist.

Remember

- Get your test results from your healthcare provider – these are usually available within two weeks
- An abnormal result does not mean you have cervical cancer but you will need more testing and maybe treatment
- Understand your test results – ask questions
- Return for follow-up when recommended

National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR)

All cervical test results are sent by the laboratory to your healthcare provider and to the NCSR, a confidential database. The NCSR sends letters to invite women to screen and remind women who are overdue for a test. The NCSR can:

- Update your contact details
- Look up when your next test is due

Your healthcare provider can give you more information.

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Cervical Screening Test (CST) results

Make sure you:

- Get your test results from your healthcare provider, usually available within two weeks
- Understand your test results – ask questions
- Return for any follow-up testing.



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Encouraging women to screen

Whilst many women will screen, there are some that won't screen for various reasons. Finding ways around these reasons may encourage women to screen and reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer.

Activity: Ask the group

Ask the group to name as many potential barriers to cervical screening as they can. Discuss these barriers and ask the group to come up with solutions that may help overcome them.

Some common barriers are:

- Lack of time
- History of sexual abuse and/or assault
- Jealousy
- Lack of transport
- No one to look after kids
- Putting the health needs of their partner/children before their own
- No suitable healthcare provider/service
- Confidentiality concerns
- Feeling embarrassed of their bodies
- Shame
- Fear



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Encouraging women to screen



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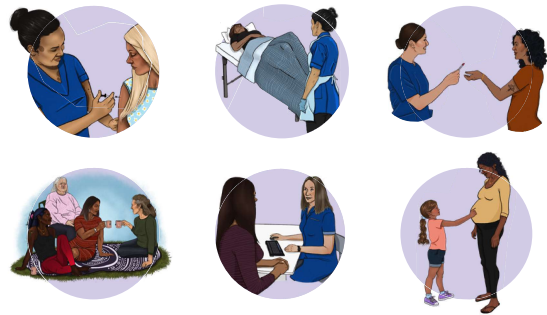
What to remember

- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.
- A Cervical Screening Test (CST) is to check for HPV, not cervical cancer.
- You can choose to have a healthcare provider collect your CST sample, or you can collect your own sample.
- Have a CST every five years unless your healthcare provider tells you to come in earlier.
- Attend all follow-up appointments.
- Complete all doses of the HPV vaccine, if appropriate.
- Encourage young people to have all doses of the HPV vaccine.
- Encourage all women in your family and community to have regular cervical screening.



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What to remember



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Acknowledgements

The WACCPP would like to acknowledge and thank all contributors of this flipchart. This includes members of the former BreastScreen WA and the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program's Aboriginal Women's Reference Group, health care services, organisations and community members for their time to create and pilot test this flipchart.

About the artist: Nerolie Bynder

Nerolie is a proud Badimia, Yamatji and Noongar woman who was born in Three Springs, WA. Being an Aboriginal woman, mother, grandmother, daughter and sister, Nerolie is very much involved in women's health.

Nerolie uses her art as a therapy and her inspiration comes from her life journey, her family life, her old people and her mother's artistic outlook. Nerolie has been interested in art from a young age and first displayed her talent in 2018 at the Moorditj Art Yarning Exhibitions for NABIDOC Perth. Since then, Nerolie has completed many other beautiful works for people to enjoy.

About the illustrator: Yabini Kickett (Esther McDowell)

Yabini Kickett (Esther McDowell) is a descendant of the Kickett and Hayden families of the Noongar/Bibbulmun Nation.

Having grown up with an artist and poet mother, as well as a photographer and land conservationist father, her practice as a multimedia artist is heavily influenced by language, endemic plant species to birds, family and found objects.

In recent years Yabini has begun to explore textiles in homage to her maternal kakbarri (grandmother) Enid and the use of bush medicines, as well as animal remains in recognition of her maternal dembarri (grandfather) Clarence. These textile works are heavily rooted in place, solastalgia and reconnecting with past family.

Yabini has also worked across community arts and youth work in Mirrabooka and surrounding areas.

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Cervical screening flipchart

Artwork by Nerolie Bynder. Illustrations by Yabini Kickett (Esther McDowell). Produced by the WACCPP.

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