



**5**

**MINUTES  
THAT MATTER**

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**CERVICAL SCREENING  
SAVES LIVES**

**HPV (HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS)  
AND CERVICAL SCREENING**

# The WI's 5 Minutes that Matter campaign

Since 2019, the WI has been campaigning to raise awareness of the importance of cervical screening through our 5 Minutes that Matter campaign and, in April 2021, we published the findings of our research with nearly 3,000 women.

As part of this research, we asked about HPV (human papillomavirus); how comfortable women feel about talking about it, and around how HPV can be passed on.

We found that there are many misconceptions about HPV and that women can feel confused, worried or embarrassed about it.

The full results can be accessed here: [www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns/key-and-current-campaigns/5-minutes-that-matter](http://www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns/key-and-current-campaigns/5-minutes-that-matter)

We want to help change this so, with the support of Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust and the Cancer Prevention Group at King's College London, this resource aims to help you understand HPV and your cervical screening results.

For further information and support, please visit Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust's website.

If you have questions about cervical screening invitations, your results or any symptoms you are experiencing, speak to your GP.

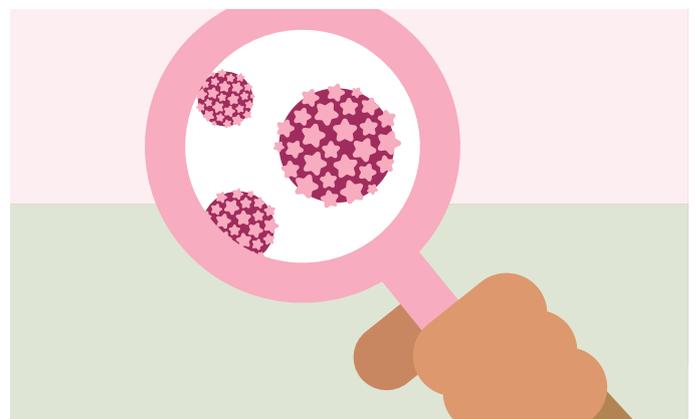
## What is HPV?

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a very common virus that most people will get at some point in their lives. It usually goes away by itself without causing any problems as, most of the time, including if you have high-risk HPV, your immune system will get rid of it.

There are high-risk and low-risk types of HPV. Most HPV types are low risk – they can cause no problems, or minor conditions like warts. HPV types linked to the development of cancer are called high-risk types.

A small proportion of infections with high-risk types of HPV can cause changes to cells in the cervix (abnormal cells), so attending regular cervical screening is important as it can help prevent cervical cancer.

Watch Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust's video to find out more: [www.jostrust.org.uk/information/hpv/what-is-hpv](http://www.jostrust.org.uk/information/hpv/what-is-hpv)



## How is it passed on?

HPV is mainly transmitted through sexual contact of any kind (including vaginal, oral and anal sex), and has no symptoms so it's difficult to know if someone has it.

However, there are lots of misconceptions about how HPV can be passed on - it's not hereditary or transmitted via blood or body fluids (but through skin-to-skin contact). It's also a myth that you can only get it through unprotected sex or from a male partner.

Women aged 50–64 years should be aware that HPV can take a long time to develop into cancer (on average between

10–30 years). This means that even if you have not been sexually active for a long time or have only had one partner for a long time, you could still be at risk of cervical cancer.

Even if you have had the HPV vaccine, you are still at risk of cervical cancer as it doesn't protect you from all types of HPV. This means that cervical screening remains an important test.

You can read more about the HPV vaccine on the NHS website: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/hpv-human-papillomavirus-vaccine/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/hpv-human-papillomavirus-vaccine/)

# What is HPV primary screening?

In 2018 in Wales and 2019 in England, the primary test in the cervical screening programme changed from cytology (where cells are examined under a microscope) to testing for high-risk HPV. This is because it will help to determine a woman's risk of cancer earlier.

In almost all cases, cervical cancers are caused by persistent high-risk HPV infections, which can cause changes to the cervical cells. It is usually quite a slow process from having HPV to having cell changes and subsequently cervical cancer. Most people with HPV won't develop cell changes or cervical cancer.

HPV primary screening first looks for HPV. If HPV is present, the same sample is checked for cervical cell changes.

It doesn't affect what happens at your cervical screening appointment; it just means your sample will still be sent to a lab but will be tested for high-risk HPV first.

WI research in 2020 showed that many people are unaware of this change - 63% of over 2,800 women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 who took part in our survey.



# What happens if HPV is not found?

This is the most likely result. If high-risk HPV is not found (an 'HPV negative' result), it means you are very unlikely to develop cell changes in the time to your next routine cervical screening appointment (3 to 5 years depending on your age and where you live). Your sample will not be looked at for cell changes, even if you have had this in the past.

No screening is 100% effective, so there is a chance of getting an inaccurate result. A 'false negative' result is very rare and when cervical screening misses an HPV infection that requires further investigation. Even though it's very unlikely, it's still possible to develop cervical cancer before your next routine appointment, so it's important to know the symptoms and contact your GP if you are worried.

For information on the symptoms of cervical cancer visit Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust website, and Cancer Research UK for tips on seeing your GP and what to expect during your appointment.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust: [www.jostrust.org.uk/information/cervical-cancer/about-cervical-cancer/symptoms](http://www.jostrust.org.uk/information/cervical-cancer/about-cervical-cancer/symptoms)

Cancer Research UK: [www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer/symptoms](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer/symptoms)

# What happens if HPV is found?

If high-risk HPV is found in your sample (an 'HPV positive' result) it will be looked at for cell changes.

If there are no cell changes, you will be invited back for cervical screening in 1 year. This is to make sure the HPV has cleared (it usually does).

If there are cell changes, you will be invited to a different test to look at your cervix in more detail (a colposcopy) but this doesn't mean you have cervical cancer.

In fact, it's very unlikely. A colposcopy can confirm if the cells in your cervix are abnormal and determine if you need treatment to remove them.

## Support and further information

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust cannot give you medical advice about your results, but are there for you if you have questions or concerns about HPV or any aspect of cervical health.

You can call or email their free Helpline on **0808 802 8000** or at **[www.jostrust.org.uk/get-support/helpline/email](http://www.jostrust.org.uk/get-support/helpline/email)**

If you, or a loved one has been affected by cervical cancer or cell changes (abnormal cells), they offer online and face-to-face support, as well as opportunities to talk to and meet others in a similar situation. Visit **[www.jostrust.org.uk/support](http://www.jostrust.org.uk/support)** to find out more.

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