

# Qld Communication Toolkit

## Promoting Self Collection for Cervical Screening



Everyone who is due for a Cervical Screening Test now has the option to choose either self-collection or to have a sample taken by a GP or other healthcare provider.

This is an important message to share during National Cervical Cancer Awareness Week (7–13 November 2022) and into the future.

The Queensland Government is encouraging stakeholders to share relevant content through social media platforms and other avenues to increase awareness of the self-collect option for cervical screening.

## About the Cervical Screening Test

From July 2022, all women and people with a cervix, aged 25 - 74 years, who have ever had sexual contact can choose to have a Cervical Screening Test either by:

- taking their own vaginal sample, or
- having a healthcare provider collect their sample.

The change will give participants a choice in screening method - either clinician-collected or self-collected. Universal access to self-collection has the potential to mitigate some of the cultural and personal barriers that may discourage some people from screening.

National Cervical Cancer Awareness Week is an opportune time to proactively communicate the availability and importance of self-collection as an alternative option for cervical screening – however it will be important to continue promotion of this topic beyond the awareness week.

## About this communications toolkit

This toolkit is based upon the National Cervical Screening Communications Toolkit that was developed by the Australian Government Department of Health and refined by the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program, in collaboration with state and territory Program partners.

The toolkit contains key messages and social content that can be used directly or adapted and edited for your channels and outlets. This is a “general” audience toolkit and does not contain information specifically designed for key target groups (aside from the published materials available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse audiences). Organisations can use their expertise and judgement to adjust key messaging to align with their target audiences.

Please use the content on your own platforms and channels to help spread the word about the importance of cervical screening. Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.

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*For any queries regarding this communication toolkit, please contact the Cancer Screening Branch via [CSSB@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:CSSB@health.qld.gov.au).*

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## About the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP)

The National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) aims to reduce illness and deaths from cervical cancer by encouraging women and people with a cervix, aged 25- 74, who have ever had any sexual contact, to have regular cervical screening.

The NCSP is a joint initiative of the Australian and state and territory governments.



## Videos and animations

[The Cancer Screening Branch has developed interactive content](#) which can be shared, covering common queries such as:

- What is a cervical screening test and why is it important?
- Who should have a cervical screening test?
- What to expect during a cervical screening test
- What happens after a cervical screening test?
- What if I'm still worried or unsure?
- Can I collect my own sample?

The NCSP has created numerous videos on cervical screening - these can be added to posts and content as required:

- [Cervical screening explained video](#)
- [Cervical screening explained video \(other languages\)](#)
- [Cervical screening explained video \(AUSLAN\)](#)
- [How to take your own Cervical Screening Test sample video](#)
- [How to take your own Cervical Screening Test sample video \(culturally and linguistically diverse audience\)](#)
- [How to take your own Cervical Screening Test sample \(for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women\)](#)
- [Your choices explained video](#)

## Social assets

High resolution copies of social media assets are available for [download from the Queensland Health Asset Library](#). Below is a selection of social media assets available to download and post on your social media channels:



## Suggested hashtags

Suggest hashtags for use on your posts to help connect readers and organisations:

- #CervicalCancer
- #CervicalCancerAwareness
- #CervicalScreening
- #CervicalScreeningTest
- #CervicalScreeningSelfCollect
- #CancerScreening
- #CancerScreeningSavesLives

- #PreventCervicalCancer
- #NationalCervicalScreeningProgram
- #NCSP

## Website links

Where practical, link your readers to the following websites for more information:

- Cervical Screening: [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)
- Self-collect for Cervical Screening: [www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect)

## Key messages for your social media posts

- All cervical screening participants now have the choice to self-collect their own Cervical Screening Test sample.
- Self-collection is now available for cervical screening.
- Anyone who is eligible for a Cervical Screening Test can now choose to test using a self-collected sample or a clinician-collected sample.
- Did you know? Most women who develop cervical cancer in Australia have either never screened or do not screen regularly.
- Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers. Protect yourself with regular cervical screening.
- Most cervical cancers can be prevented with regular screening. Don't delay your Cervical Screening Test.
- A Cervical Screening Test can save your life. Just get it done.

## Responding to comments

Please refer to “Frequently asked questions” at Appendix 1 of this document to support a prompt and consistent response to any social media comments.

## Sample text for your newsletters and articles

### OPTION 1: Prevention is in your hands. Now there is self-collect.

Did you know, almost all cervical cancers are preventable through regular cervical screening?

Cervical screening checks for human papillomavirus (HPV) - a common infection that can lead to abnormal cell changes and is the cause of almost all cervical cancers.

There are now two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect your sample from your cervix. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina.

So, if you're a woman or person with a cervix, who is aged 25 - 74 and has ever had sexual contact, get in touch with your GP or healthcare provider to check if you're due or overdue for a Cervical Screening Test – it could save your life. And if someone you love is eligible but

has never screened or hasn't screened for some time, encourage them to have cervical screening.

For more information visit [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp)

## OPTION 2: You now have a choice for your Cervical Screening Test

In 2017, the five-yearly Cervical Screening Test was introduced, replacing the two-yearly Pap Smear in Australia. The new, more accurate test looks for HPV - the cause of most cervical cancers.

There are now two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect your sample from your cervix. The other option for having a Cervical Screening Test is to collect your own sample from your vagina. Both options are accurate, safe and effective.

Most cervical cancers occur in people who have never screened or do not screen regularly. Having regular screening tests is the best way to protect against cervical cancer.

Talk with your healthcare provider to help you decide which option is best for you.

For more information visit [www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect)

## OPTION 3: A Cervical Screening Test could save your life

The Cervical Screening Test involves a simple procedure to check the health of the cervix and look for the presence of the human papillomavirus (HPV) - a common infection that causes abnormal cell changes and almost all cervical cancers.

Australia is one of the first countries globally to offer a Cervical Screening Test as part of a national population screening program, and that work, combined with our HPV vaccination program, means we are on track to be the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer as a public health problem.

There are now two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect your sample from your cervix. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina.

Join over 3 million Australians who participate in cervical screening every year and just get it done. Visit [www.health.gov.au/ncsp](http://www.health.gov.au/ncsp) for more information.

## OPTION 4: Did you know you can now take your own cervical screening sample?

As of 1 July 2022, there are two ways to have a Cervical Screening Test. You can choose to:

- take your own sample; or
- have a healthcare provider collect your sample.

A self-collected Cervical Screening Test is just as accurate at detecting HPV as a Cervical Screening Test taken by your doctor or specially trained nurse. This test is done at the doctor's or other health setting, usually in private - behind a screen or in the bathroom.

The best protection against cervical cancer is regular cervical screening. Most people who develop cervical cancer have either never screened or do not screen regularly. Speak to your healthcare provider to check if you're up to date with your cervical screening.

Discuss your options with a healthcare provider. Any healthcare provider who offers cervical screening (GPs, nurses, gynaecologists) can help you decide which option is best for you. It is important to find a healthcare provider you trust at a service where you feel comfortable.

To find out more about self-collect visit [www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect](http://www.health.gov.au/cervical-self-collect)

## Tailored resources for specific audiences

### For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

- [A new and better test for women – poster for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women](#)
- [A guide to understanding your Cervical Screening Test results – brochure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women](#)

### For culturally and linguistically diverse women

- [Your Health, Your Future: Get a Cervical Screening Test – brochure for culturally and linguistically diverse women developed with True Relationships & Reproductive Health](#)
- [A guide to understanding your Cervical Screening Test results – brochure for culturally and linguistically diverse women](#)
- [How to collect your own vaginal sample for a Cervical Screening Test - infographic for culturally and linguistically diverse women](#)

## Additional Resources

A wide range of cervical screening resources for health professionals and community can be ordered from the [National Cervical Screening Program](#).

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# Appendix 1

## Frequently asked questions - Cervical screening

The below section will support a prompt and consistent response to any social media comments received on posts.

### **Where is the cervix?**

The cervix is located at the entrance to the womb from the vagina. The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus that forms a canal between the uterus and vagina.

### **What are the symptoms of cervical cancer?**

Changes to cervical cells do not usually cause any symptoms - this is why regular cervical screening is so important. Most cervical cancers can be prevented with regular screening.

You should see your doctor, nurse or healthcare provider as soon as possible if you have:

- abnormal vaginal bleeding
- an unexplained, persistent vaginal discharge
- experience continual pain during sex

Anyone with a cervix (of any age) who has symptoms should see their healthcare provider immediately.

### **What is cervical screening?**

Cervical screening is a simple test (the Cervical Screening Test) to collect a sample from your cervix or vagina. The sample is then tested for signs of the human papillomavirus (HPV) - a common infection that causes almost all cervical cancers. Cervical screening is free for eligible program participants. Regular cervical screening can help prevent cervical cancer.

There are two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect a sample from your cervix. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina.

### **Who should have a Cervical Screening Test?**

You are eligible for a Medicare-subsidised Cervical Screening Test if you are:

- a woman or person with a cervix
- aged between 25 and 74
- sexually active or have ever had any type of sexual contact

You still need to screen regularly if you:

- are gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight
- are transgender or intersex
- have had the HPV vaccination or not
- are no longer sexually active
- have been through menopause
- have been with only one sexual partner
- have experienced female genital cutting/ mutilation (FGC/M)
- have had a baby



- are pregnant (ensure to let your health care professional know).

If you have had a full or partial hysterectomy, please check with your doctor about cervical screening.

### **What if I am outside the target age range for cervical screening?**

#### *Under 25*

It is safe to start cervical screening at age 25. Starting at age 25 means we prevent a lot of unnecessary tests and treatment. Of course, if you've already had a test and had an abnormal result, keep following your doctor's advice. If you have any concerns or notice any cervical or vaginal symptoms before you turn 25, contact your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider may choose to order a test at any time.

#### *75 or over*

Women and people with a cervix aged 70 - 74 should have an "exit" Cervical Screening Test to test that they can safely "exit" the screening program. If HPV is not detected, the risk of developing cervical cancer is very low.

Evidence shows that people of this age can safely stop having Cervical Screening Tests.

If you're 75 or over, you can still ask to have a Cervical Screening Test - just talk to your healthcare provider.

If you have not had regular Cervical Screening Tests or have had abnormal results from recent Cervical Screening Tests, you may need to keep having tests for a few more years. We encourage you to talk to a healthcare provider for advice.

### **How often should I have cervical screening?**

You are eligible to have your first Cervical Screening Test when you turn 25 and should keep screening regularly until you are 74.

If HPV isn't found, you only need to come back every 5 years. It can take almost a decade for an infection with HPV to cause cell changes - so you should feel comfortable and very safe about the 5-year interval.

### **How do I know if I am due for cervical screening?**

Contact your GP or healthcare provider to check if you're due or overdue for a Cervical Screening Test. You can also call the National Cancer Screening Register 1800 627 701 to find out when you're next due.

The National Register also has a Participant Portal that allows you to view your cancer screening program details, including when you are next due. You can access this through [www.my.gov.au](http://www.my.gov.au).

### **What does under-screened or never-screened mean?**

An under-screened person is overdue for screening. A never-screened person is someone who has never been screened.

### **What if I experience symptoms before my 5-year check-up?**

The routine Cervical Screening Test is for women and people with a cervix who do not have symptoms. We encourage you to discuss any symptoms directly with your healthcare provider as soon as possible, who will be able to advise you further.

### **Where can I get a Cervical Screening Test?**

You can get a Cervical Screening Test at different places Australia-wide. These include:

- a doctor's clinic
- a community health centre



- a women's health centre
- a family planning clinic
- a sexual health clinic
- an Aboriginal Medical Service or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service.
- [Mobile Women's Health Service | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](http://www.qld.gov.au)

Just call to book an appointment and let them know you'd like to have a Cervical Screening Test. If you think you would like to do the Cervical Screening Test self-collect option, mention this when you make the appointment.

You can find a provider near you using [healthdirect's service finder tool](#).

### **Will there be a cost to have my Cervical Screening Test?**

There is a Medicare rebate for both options – self-collected and healthcare provider-collected – of the Cervical Screening Test itself. If your chosen health service bulk bills for clinic visits there should be no cost to you, depending on when you had your last test.

Some health services do charge a consult fee, so it's best to check if there are any extra costs when making your appointment.

If you would like to find a healthcare provider that bulk bills, [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au) can help you find one to book your cervical screening with.

### **Is the Cervical Screening Test safe?**

Yes. Both healthcare provider and self-collected tests are safe and accurate.

### **What's the difference between the Pap (smear) test and the Cervical Screening Test?**

In December 2017, the 2-yearly Pap test was replaced with a more accurate 5-yearly Cervical Screening Test. The Pap test looked for cell changes in the cervix that could lead to cervical cancer, but the Cervical Screening Test looks for HPV - the cause of almost all cervical cancers - before the cells have a chance to change

### **What's the difference between the Cervical Screening Test options?**

There are two options for having a Cervical Screening Test. One option is to have a healthcare provider collect a sample from your cervix using a speculum and brush. The other option is to collect your own sample from your vagina using a swab.

The biggest difference between the two is that the self-collect option uses a swab to take a sample from the vagina to test for HPV only and does not include cells from the cervix.

If HPV is detected, the cervical cells will also need to be examined to check whether the HPV has caused any cell changes or abnormalities.

If your sample was taken from the cervix by a healthcare provider, the cervical cells will be present and can automatically be tested. However, if your sample was self-collected, you will need to return to your healthcare provider for a speculum examination so a sample of cells can be taken from the cervix.

### **I had the HPV vaccination; do I still have to have cervical screening?**

Yes. Even if you've had the HPV vaccination, you still need to do regular cervical screening. The HPV vaccine doesn't protect against all HPV types that are associated with cancer of the cervix.

### **I had my cervix removed with my hysterectomy; do I still have to have cervical screening?**

This will depend on the type of hysterectomy you had and on your previous history. It is best to speak with your GP about your individual circumstances and the need to continue screening.

**I've only had sex with women; do I need to have cervical screening?**

Yes. Anyone who has had ANY type of sexual contact (with anyone, of any gender) can get HPV - the common virus that causes almost all cervical cancers. HPV is shared through genital skin to skin contact.

**I am a transgender man with a cervix; do I need to have cervical screening?**

Yes. If you're trans or non-binary and have a cervix, you should get screened every 5 years if you have ever had any type of sexual contact. Anyone with a cervix is at risk of developing cervical cancer.

The Cervical Screening Test self-collect option is available if you are not comfortable with a healthcare provider collected test.

**I'm pregnant; can I still have cervical screening?**

Yes. Cervical screening is safe in pregnancy. Many people go to see their doctor when they're pregnant or think they might be. If you're over 25 and pregnant, that's the perfect opportunity to have a Cervical Screening Test if you haven't had one yet.

The Cervical Screening Test self-collection option is also available and safe in pregnancy.

**Can I have cervical screening when I have my period?**

Yes. You can have a Cervical Screening Test while you have your period. However, if you choose to book this for when you don't have your period or not on the heavy bleeding days (usually the first day or two of your period) – it can help you feel more comfortable.

**Why do you use the term 'person with a cervix'?**

In most instances, we use the terms 'women' and 'men' because they are the simplest terms to use when talking about health and are easily understood by the general population. However, we also recognise that Australia is made up of a diverse group of individuals, so in some programs we do use language with gender diverse terminology. In these instances, we generally add other gender identities as additions to, not replacements of, those terms.

For example, the National Cervical Screening Program uses 'women and people with a cervix' when referring to cervical screening gender eligibility. This terminology aims to reach as many people as possible to encourage them to have regular, life-saving cervical screening. This includes those who identify as women and other gender diverse people with a cervix. This approach also acknowledges that not all women have cervixes (e.g., due to hysterectomy).

Our main goal is to make sure that everyone who is eligible for cervical screening is aware of the importance of regular screening because cancer screening saves lives.

## Frequently asked questions - Self-collect option

**Who can choose to self-collect a Cervical Screening Test sample?**

Anyone eligible for cervical screening can choose to collect their Cervical Screening Test sample themselves.

**Do I have to do a self-collected test? Can I still have the doctor collect my sample?**

The self-collection option is just that - an option. You can continue to have your Cervical Screening Test done by your chosen healthcare provider using a speculum examination if you prefer.

You can discuss the options with your healthcare provider to find out which choice is best for you.

### **How do I have a self-collected Cervical Screening Test? Can I have one sent to my home or pick one up from a chemist/pharmacy?**

The National Cervical Screening Program is not delivering a home mail-out program at this time. You should speak with your doctor or healthcare provider about doing a self-collected test.

If you choose to self-collect your Cervical Screening Test you will be given a private space to collect the sample, for example behind a curtain or in a bathroom.

### **Why is a doctor still involved in the process if it's self-collected?**

Your healthcare provider does not need to oversee or be present when you collect your own sample, but it is important that you have the necessary support from a healthcare provider to make sure the test is performed correctly, answer any questions you may have, provide your results and explain what they may mean, and support you in any follow-up examinations.

### **Does self-collection cost more?**

The Cervical Screening Test is covered under Medicare – provided you are eligible for cervical screening, and only have one Cervical Screening Test (either self-collected or provider collected) every 5 years.

Some health services do charge a consultation fee, so it's best to check if there are any extra costs when making your appointment.

If you would like to find a bulk-billing healthcare provider, you can visit [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au) to find one.

### **How do I know I am getting the right spot/my cervix?**

The Cervical Screening Test detects HPV before it has the chance to cause abnormal or cancerous cells. HPV can be detected from inside the vagina so there is no need for the collection swab to reach the cervix as part of the self-collected test.

The swab used for the Cervical Screening Test self-collect option only needs to be inserted into the vagina a few centimetres, up to the marker indicated on the swab, and rotated for 20-30 seconds.

### **When is self-collection not appropriate?**

Self-collection of a vaginal sample is not appropriate for those who require a co-test, for example because they have cervical cancer symptoms.

A co-test is where the pathology laboratory tests for both HPV and liquid-based cytology (LBC) on the same sample at the same time. This means that the LBC test is done regardless of the HPV test result.

Unless a co-test is required, LBC is generally only tested if HPV is found on the initial sample. A co-test requires a healthcare provider-collected cervical sample and cannot be performed on a self-collected vaginal sample.

### **What happens if my self-collected test comes back positive for HPV?**

If HPV is detected in the results of your self-collected cervical screening test, your healthcare provider will recommend you return to have a healthcare provider-collected test to investigate further.