

## Debate Pack

Number CDP 2021-0113

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15 July 2021

# Debate on a petition relating to cervical screening

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## Summary

This pack has been prepared ahead of the E-petition debate on routine cervical screening on 19 July 2021 at 4:30pm. The debate will be opened by Tonia Antoniazzi MP, and can be viewed on [parliamentlive.tv](https://parliamentlive.tv).

The petition for [Fiona's Law](#) is calling for every woman in England to be able to access a yearly smear test. It was set up in memory of Fiona, who lost her life to cervical cancer.

Every year in the UK, around [3,200 people get cervical cancer](#), and [Cancer Research UK estimates](#) in 2018, 857 people died of cervical cancer. Whilst there is no single preventative method, the NHS advises the [best way to protect yourself](#) is by attending a cervical screening (previously known as a “smear” test).

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP) reaches approximately 7 million people [and saves around 5,000 lives](#) every year in England. The Programme is part of the NHS Long Term Plan, which aims to catch [tens of thousands more cancers](#) earlier.

[Cervical screening](#) in England is offered to people with a cervix aged from 25 to 64. Routine screening is offered every three years up to 49 years of age and every five years from 50 to 64 years of age.

However, the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) recommended in 2019 that the [interval be extended](#) to five years for individuals who test negative for high-risk HPV.

### Impact of the pandemic

There were [reports of delays and cancellations](#) to cervical screenings due to the pandemic. Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust estimated that around 600,000 tests failed to go ahead in the UK in April and May 2020

An NHS [interactive data dashboard](#) shows the level of coverage (the percentage of women eligible for screening at a given point in time who were screened adequately within a specified period) achieved across England. In the third quarter of 2020/21, no Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) achieved 80% coverage.

# 1 Background

## 1.1 Cervical screening

Cervical screening (sometimes referred to as a smear test) is a method of detecting abnormal cells on the cervix. It is estimated that screening saves 5,000 lives each year in England.<sup>1</sup>

The NHS webpage '[What is cervical screening?](#)' says:

- Cervical screening is not a test for cancer, it's a test to help prevent cancer.
- All women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 should be invited by letter.
- During the screening appointment, a small sample of cells will be taken from your cervix.
- The sample is checked for certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that can cause changes to the cells of your cervix. These are called "high risk" types of HPV.
- If these types of HPV are not found, you do not need any further tests.
- If these types of HPV are found, the sample is then checked for any changes in the cells of your cervix. These can then be treated before they get a chance to turn into cervical cancer.<sup>2</sup>

It was announced in 2016 that [HPV primary screening would be implemented into the NHS Cervical Screening Programme](#) and it was rolled out fully across England in December 2019.<sup>3</sup>

An NHS England article "["Potential to eliminate" cervical cancer in England thanks to NHS Long Term Plan](#)" (January 2020) outlines how the move to primary HPV testing in England in 2019 (replacing cytology) has meant signs of infection can be "spotted at an earlier stage before it could potentially develop into cancer".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NHS Mid Essex, [Cervical Screening saves lives says new campaign](#), 9 May 2019

<sup>2</sup> NHS England, [What is cervical screening?](#), Last updated 31 March 2020

<sup>3</sup> NHS Digital, Cervical Screening Programme, England - 2019-20, [Appendix J: Impact of HPV primary screening](#), 26 November 2020

<sup>4</sup> NHS England, ["Potential to eliminate" cervical cancer in England thanks to NHS Long Term Plan](#), 20 January 2020

The article goes on to say:

The new and more sensitive test now looks for traces of high risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV), which causes nearly all cases of cervical cancer.

HPV is a group of viruses with more than 100 types, but 14 types can cause cervical cancer as well as some head and neck cancers. [...]

There are 2,500 new cases of cervical cancer in England every year but research says that a quarter of those could be prevented with this new way of testing.

The introduction is part of the [NHS Long Term Plan's](#) ambitions to catch tens of thousands more cancers earlier, when it is easier to treat and the chance of survival is higher.<sup>5</sup>

## Frequency of cervical screening

Cervical screening in England is offered to people with a cervix aged from 25 to 64.

Routine screening is offered every three years up to 49 years of age and every five years from 50 to 64 years of age.

However, the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) recommended in 2019 that the interval be extended to five years for individuals who test negative for high-risk HPV.<sup>6</sup>

Public Health England has said the extended screening intervals will be implemented once primary HPV screening has been fully implemented and the necessary IT developments allow it.<sup>7</sup> This is summarised in the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance '[Who should be called for routine cervical screening?](#)'. Further information on the UK NSC and its recommendations can be found below.

## Follow-up screening

Depending on the result of the screening, individuals may be recalled earlier. For example, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) note in its [cervical screening summary](#), that individuals who are high-risk HPV positive and receive a negative cytology report should have the HPV test repeated at 12 months.<sup>8</sup>

People who remain high-risk HPV positive and cytology report negative at 12 months, should have a repeat test in a further 12 months. After 24 months,

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<sup>5</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Public Health England, [Guidance: Introduction and programme policy](#), Updated 5 February 2020

<sup>7</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>8</sup> NICE, [Cervical screening: summary](#), Last updated May 2021

people who then test negative for high-risk HPV return to routine recall. However, if they continue to test positive for high-risk HPV and receive a negative cytology report, they are referred for a colposcopy.<sup>9 10</sup>

## Current cervical screening intervals

Women and people with a cervix should be offered screening at the following intervals:

- 24.5 years for their first invitation to ensure they can be screened before they are 25.
- 25–49 years should be offered screening every three years.
- 50–64 years should be offered screening every five years.
- 65 years or older should be screened if:
  - A recent cervical cytology sample is abnormal.
  - They have not had a cervical screening test since they had turned 50 and they request one.

Public Health England (PHE) has published guidance '[Cervical screening: guidance for call and recall administration best practice](#)' (updated June 2021) which says:

Where individuals do not respond to a screening invitation, they are designated as 'non-responders' after 32 weeks and may receive additional reminder letters from their GP practice. Individuals who remain eligible for screening are recalled at intervals according to current protocols. [...]

It explains that a 'call and recall' service is used to contact people, based on GP-held demographic data. Screenings can take place in GP surgeries or community and sexual health clinics (CaSH). It adds that anyone not registered with an NHS GP won't get an automatic invitation for screening:

They can choose to self-refer for screening at the routine intervals if they satisfy the age and residency requirements. Self-referrals will usually attend a CaSH clinic.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>10</sup> A [colposcopy](#) is a procedure used to look at the cervix

<sup>11</sup> [Ibid.](#)

## 1.2

# Calls for annual cervical screening

The petition '[Fiona's Law – Women should be allowed a yearly cervical screening](#)' closed on 7 March 2021 and received 146,632 signatures.

The petition set out the following:

**FIONA'S LAW** - Women should be allowed a yearly Cervical screening

Cervical screening needs to be every year.

This is because women are dying, mothers, wives, daughters, granddaughters and sisters are dying.

We need yearly checks regardless of the statistics.

It should be law that every women in England can access a yearly smear test.

So they have a future.

You are preventing women from watching their children grow.

My friend will never see her children's first day at school, watch her children grow, fall in love, watch them get married or hold her grandchildren.

This could have been prevented.<sup>12</sup>

The [Government responded to the petition](#) on 10 February 2021. It said:

The NHS cervical screening programme reaches approximately 7 million people and saves an estimated 5,000 lives per year, and is a key part of the Government's commitment in the NHS Long Term Plan to detect 75% of cancers at stage 1 or 2, and for 55,000 more people to survive cancer for five years in England each year from 2028.

It set out the ages when people are invited for a routine screening but added:

it is important that anyone at any time and of any age who is worried about cervical cancer, or who notices any unusual symptoms, should not wait for a routine screening appointment and should see their GP as soon as possible.

NHS screening programmes and policy are based on the expert advice of the United Kingdom National Screening Committee (UK NSC). Using

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<sup>12</sup> Parliament.uk, [Fiona's Law – Women should be allowed a yearly cervical screening](#)

research evidence, pilot programmes and economic evaluation, the UN NSC continually assesses the evidence for programmes and the way in which they are delivered against a set of internationally recognised criteria[...]

If HPV is detected as part of routine screening, a cytology test to check for any abnormal cells is then used in a second stage of screening. If no abnormal cells are found, a follow up screening appointment is arranged 12 months later to see if the immune system has cleared the virus.

If, however, a woman does not have any evidence of HPV infection during routine screening, her chances of developing a cancer within five years are very small. As nearly all (99.7%) cervical cancer is caused by HPV, a HPV-negative result indicates that there is no requirement for further tests. It would be highly unlikely in these circumstances that there would be any abnormal cells, and even if there were, it would be extremely unlikely that they would cause any problems since research suggests that at least ten years elapses between acquiring HPV and developing cancer[...]

On the basis of this rigorous two stage process, the high negative predictive value of HPV testing and the low false negative rate, the UK NSC does not recommend that women be tested every year.

We acknowledge however that screening is not perfect and will not detect all cases. For cervical screening, this can happen if the HPV infection or abnormal cells are missed, or because abnormal cells develop and turn into cancer in between screening tests[...]

The incidence of cervical cancer can also be reduced by reducing the incidence of HPV infection circulating in the population through vaccination. Since 2008, girls aged 12-13 years old have been offered a first dose in school year 8. From September 2019, boys in year 8 have also been offered the HPV vaccine to further decrease the circulation of HPV. The vaccine has led to a dramatic reduction in HPV infection in young women in England, and will reduce their future risk of cervical cancer. A sustained programme of HPV vaccination is eventually expected to save over 300 lives a year (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hpv-vaccine-could-prevent-over-100-000-cancers>).

Due to the high accuracy and predictive value of the HPV screening test, the UK NSC has not recommended that women are screened on a yearly basis. Cases such as Fiona's, while extremely tragic, are rare. The most effective way to prevent deaths from cervical cancer is for as many women as possible to attend their routine appointments.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Parliament.uk, [Fiona's Law - Women should be allowed a yearly cervical screening](#), closed 7 March 2021

The full text of the Government’s response is available below [the petition](#).

## 1.3

# NHS Cervical Screening Programme

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP) was established in 1988.<sup>14</sup>

The estimated cost of the NHSCSP is £185 million per year in England, and this includes the taking of samples, laboratory costs, and colposcopies.<sup>15</sup>

The aim of the NHSCSP is to reduce the number of people who develop invasive cervical cancer (incidence) and the number of people who die from it (mortality). It does this by offering regular screening to people aged 24.5 to 64 who have a cervix.<sup>16</sup>

Some “[significant milestones](#)” in the NHSCSP programme has included the introduction of the [national HPV vaccination programme](#) for girls and boys aged 12 to 13.<sup>17</sup>

An [overview of the NHS cervical screening programme](#) has been published by Public Health England which provides further information.<sup>18</sup>

## Role of the UK National Screening Committee

Cervical screening is one of 11 [NHS population screening programmes](#) available in England.

The [UK National Screening Committee](#) (UK NSC) makes recommendations to ministers in the four UK countries on all aspects of population screening and “ensures that screening provides more benefit than harm, at a reasonable cost to the NHS”.<sup>19</sup>

PHE says recommendations are “based on [internationally recognised criteria](#) and a rigorous [evidence review process](#)”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Public Health England, [Guidance: Topic 1: the NHS Cervical Screening Programme \(NHSCSP\)](#), Last updated 28 February 2020

<sup>15</sup> NHS England, [Report of the independent review of adult screening programmes in England](#), October 2019

<sup>16</sup> Public Health England, [Guidance: Topic 1: the NHS Cervical Screening Programme \(NHSCSP\)](#), Last updated 28 February 2020

<sup>17</sup> Public Health England, [Guidance: Topic 1: the NHS Cervical Screening Programme \(NHSCSP\)](#), Last updated 28 February 2020

In July 2018, it was announced that the HPV vaccine would be extended to boys aged 12 to 13 years in England

<sup>18</sup> Public Health England, [Cervical screening: programme overview](#), last updated 17 March 2021

<sup>19</sup> Public Health England, [Cervical screening: programme overview](#), Last updated 17 March 2021

<sup>20</sup> [Ibid.](#)

The latest UK NSC review of cervical screening took place in April 2019.<sup>21</sup> The next review is estimated to be completed in 2022 to 2023.<sup>22</sup>

In 2019, the UK NSC recommended that screening takes place every five rather than three years for people aged 24.5 to 49 years, if they test negative for high risk HPV (hrHPV) during a routine screening.<sup>23</sup>

The supporting documents published by the UK NSC include information on [the justification for extending screening intervals](#) from three to five years. The documents also cover consultation responses from stakeholders on the proposals. For example, Cancer Research UK note:

HPV primary testing has stronger negative predictive power over cytology and is better able to pick up women with cell changes caused by HPV. Because of this, we agree that the screening interval can safely be extended to five years, as shown by several European trials.<sup>24</sup>

## Statistics

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme aims to reach “at least” 80% of people eligible<sup>25</sup>. 75% coverage is considered “acceptable”<sup>26</sup>.

Coverage is defined as the percentage of women or people with a cervix eligible for screening at a given point in time who were screened adequately within a specified period (within 3.5 years for those aged 25 to 49, and within 5.5 years for those aged 50 to 64).<sup>27</sup>

NHS Digital has published [interactive data dashboards](#) which show the level of coverage achieved across England. In the third quarter of 2020/21, no Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) achieved 80% coverage.<sup>28</sup>

NHS England commissioned an [independent review of adult screening programmes](#) which was published in October 2019. The review highlights “demographic factors and levels of affluence, deprivation and ethnic diversity affect uptake and coverage across programmes”.<sup>29</sup> For example, CCGs with higher levels of deprivation were found to have lower coverage, whilst CCGs

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<sup>21</sup> GOV.UK, [UK National Screening Committee, Adult screening programme: Cervical Cancer](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>23</sup> Public Health England, [Guidance: Introduction and programme policy](#), Updated 5 February 2020

<sup>24</sup> UK National Screening Committee, [Cervical screening: Programme modifications looking at: interval/surveillance, women over 64 and self-sampling](#), 27 February 2019

<sup>25</sup> Public Health England, [Guidance: Topic 1: the NHS Cervical Screening Programme \(NHSCSP\)](#), Last updated 28 February 2020

<sup>26</sup> NHS England, [Report of the Independent Review of Adult Screening Programmes in England](#), October 2019, p65

<sup>27</sup> NHS Digital, [Cervical Screening Programme – Coverage Statistics](#), 15 April 2021

<sup>28</sup> NHS Digital, [Cervical Screening Programme – Coverage Statistics](#), CCG dashboard: CCG coverage map, 15 April 2021

<sup>29</sup> NHS England, [Report of the Independent Review of Adult Screening Programmes in England](#), October 2019, p61

with older populations tended to have higher coverage than those serving younger populations.<sup>30</sup>

NHS Digital and PHE also jointly publish [annual reports](#) on the NHS Cervical Screening Programme for England. The latest report for 2019/20 sets out the following statistics:

- **72.2% of eligible women aged 25 to 64 were adequately screened.** This was a 0.3 percentage point increase on the previous year, when coverage was 71.9%.
- **4.63 million women aged 25 to 64 were invited for screening.** This is an increase of 5.0% on the previous year, when 4.41 million were invited.
- **3.20 million women aged 25 to 64 were tested.** This is a decrease of 6.8% on the previous year, when 3.43 million were tested.<sup>31</sup>

PHE published the first [data report on national NHS Cervical Screening Programme standards](#) in January 2020, which it says “complements” its joint publications with NHS Digital.”

## 1.4

## Measures to increase uptake and coverage

The [independent review of adult screening programmes](#) (October 2019) commissioned by NHS England says “the proportion of women responding to an invitation to participate in the cervical screening programmes has declined over time”.<sup>32</sup>

The review includes the following:

Coverage varies across the country and is at a 20-year low. It is particularly low in deprived populations and populations with high proportions of ethnic minority populations. Uptake is particularly low in women in the youngest age band (25-29 years). Evidence based interventions to increase uptake/coverage are not being systematically implemented in all parts of the country:

- **Text reminders** A large-scale pilot in London has shown that it is possible to send text reminders to the large majority of women who

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<sup>30</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>31</sup> NHS Digital, [Cervical Screening Programme, England – 2019-20](#), 26 November 2020

NHS and PHE annual reports give screening statistics for women. However, transgender men and non-binary people with cervixes are invited for cervical screening. More information can be found on the NHS site [NHS population screening: information for trans and non-binary people](#) (20 May 2019)

<sup>32</sup> NHS England, [Report of the Independent Review of Adult Screening Programmes in England](#), October 2019, p126

are due for screening. This includes women who have never previously attended screening. Furthermore, this pilot resulted in an increase in uptake of over 4%.

- **Campaigns and use of social media** Social media programmes, in some areas, have led to increases in uptake. These should be undertaken more widely with formal evaluation. If successful, these approaches should be adopted nationally. A peak in the number of women tested in 2009 can almost certainly be attributed to the widespread publicity following the death of Jade Goody from cervical cancer. This was followed by a further peak in 2012 when the additional attenders would have been recalled. The additional peaks are only observed in the younger age group.
- **Acceptability of testing HPV self-sampling** may be more acceptable to some women than attending a GP surgery for sampling. This requires further evaluation.<sup>33</sup>

PHE launched the '[Cervical Screening Save Lives](#)' campaign on 5 March 2019. PHE [evaluated the campaign](#) across a series of metrics, including [cervical screening uptake](#) and [coverage](#), and published the findings on 12 July 2021.

## 1.5

### Impact of the pandemic

There were [reports of delays and cancellations](#) to cervical screenings due to the pandemic. Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust estimated that around 600,000 tests failed to go ahead in the UK in April and May 2020.<sup>34</sup>

Following a [Parliamentary Question](#) about how many patients in England are overdue for their cervical screening appointments, on 14 January 2021, Jo Churchill, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care said that although waiting lists for NHS screening programmes aren't held, NHS England and NHS Improvement was "confident" that no one eligible for cervical screening has been missed from receiving an invitation:

Invitation and reminder letters for the NHS cervical screening programme in England continued to be issued throughout the pandemic. The intervals at which invitation and reminder letters were issued for the programme was extended on 9 April 2020. This meant that some have received an invitation later than expected. This was a temporary measure put in place to support cervical screening providers as they faced reduced capacity.

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<sup>33</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>34</sup> BBC News, [Cancer: Women to trial 'do-it-at-home' kits for NHS](#), 24 February 2021

From June 2020, the normal invitation and reminder parameter was restored with normal service resumed by October 2020.<sup>35</sup>

In response to a [Parliamentary Question](#) (140746) on 1 February 2021, Jo Churchill MP<sup>36</sup> said cervical screening services were a “priority”, and NHS staff and facilities should not be redeployed “as far as possible”:

NHS England and NHS Improvement have issued guidance to support providers to continue to deliver services, including Infection Prevention and Control advice and innovations such as providing screening appointments in a greater range of venues.

Should there be any disruption to local screening services, NHS England and NHS Improvement have a process in place for regional public health commissioning teams to quickly escalate and put in place actions to rapidly address and resolve issues.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> PQ 131312, [Cervical Cancer: Screening](#), Answered on 14 January 2021

<sup>36</sup> Jo Churchill MP currently holds the Government post of Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department of Health and Social Care).

<sup>37</sup> PQ 140746, [Cervical Cancer: Screening](#), Answered on 1 February 2021

## 2 Parliamentary material

### 2.1 Debates

#### Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

29 October 2019 | House of Commons | 667 c190

#### Cervical Cancer Smear Tests

28 January 2019 | House of Commons | 653 cc260WH - 288WH

### 2.2 Parliamentary Questions

#### Human Papillomavirus

28 June 2021 | 19726

**Asked by: Feryal Clark**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department has taken to increase public awareness of (a) HPV and (b) the importance of HPV screening.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

NHS England and NHS Improvement work with Public Health England (PHE) and Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust to promote awareness of human papillomavirus (HPV) and the Cervical Screening Programme. This includes a range of social media campaigns which include narratives from participants' and health professionals' perspectives.

PHE has also published a range of promotional material and social media campaigns to raise awareness of HPV, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hpv-vaccination-programme>(opens in a new tab)

The 'Helping you decide' leaflet informs women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 years old of the benefits and risks of cervical screening. This is sent with the invitation letter and is available in ten different languages and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-description-in-brief>

**Cervical Cancer: Screening**

**25 May 2021 | 1197**

**Asked by: Damien Moore**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has plans to introduce smear tests on demand for people who request that test via their GP.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

There are currently no plans to introduce smear tests on demand. The NHS Cervical Screening Programme offers regular, routine tests for the human papillomavirus which can cause cervical cancer, to all women between the ages of 25 and 64 years old. This programme is intended for women without any symptoms to help detect cervical abnormalities at an early stage.

**Cervical Cancer: Screening**

**14 January 2021 | 131312**

**Asked by: Justin Madders**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many patients in England are overdue for their cervical cancer screening appointments.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

While we do not hold waiting lists for National Health Service screening programmes, NHS England and NHS Improvement are confident that no one eligible for cervical screening has missed an invitation for an appointment. Invitation and reminder letters for the NHS cervical screening programme in England continued to be issued throughout the pandemic. The intervals at which invitation and reminder letters were issued for the programme was extended on 9 April 2020. This meant that some have received an invitation later than expected. This was a temporary measure put in place to support cervical screening providers as they faced reduced capacity. From June 2020, the normal invitation and reminder parameter was restored with normal service resumed by October 2020.

**Cervical Cancer: Screening**

**14 January 2021 | 134270**

**Asked by: Alex Davies-Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that trans men are able to access cervical cancer screening tests.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

In England general practices are responsible for inviting eligible trans men to participate in National Health Service cervical screening at the appropriate intervals and for notifying them of their results in line with NHS Cervical Screening Programme guidance. Invitations are sent out using the current call and recall information technology system.

Health England has developed guidance for trans and non-binary individuals explaining who will be invited to participate in cervical screening as well as breast screening, bowel cancer screening and abdominal aortic aneurysm screening. It includes important information about the four screening programmes and how to access additional support and advice and can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-population-screening-information-for-transgender-people>

It is important therefore that individuals ensure that their general practitioner records are up to date, in order to ensure they are offered appropriate screening.

### **Cervical Cancer: Screening**

**21 September 2020 | 81805**

**Asked by: Robert Halfon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure the availability of cervical screening to people who show symptoms of cervical cancer.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

Women with symptoms of cervical cancer are urged to speak to their general practitioner (GP) as soon as possible. Cancer services continued during the COVID-19 crisis, although some appointments were rescheduled to protect vulnerable patients from having to attend hospitals. The recovery and restoration of screening and cancer services is well underway with detailed guidance issued by NHS England and NHS Improvement, including ensuring patients have clear information on how to access services and are confident about making appointments for current concerns.

NHS England is investing more than £258 million in initiatives to improve access to general practice as part of the delivery of the GP Five Year Forward View. More than half the country is now benefitting from improved access to all routine appointments (including cervical screening), at evening and weekends.

### **Cervical Cancer: Screening**

**17 March 2020 | 26874**

**Asked by: Christian Matheson**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that women with a family history of cervical cancer are given cervical cancer screening when they request it, regardless of (a) age and (b) time since their last smear test.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

Having a family history of cervical cancer does not affect your chances of developing the disease; most cervical cancers are caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). Regular cervical screening is one of the best ways to identify abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix at an early stage.

Evidence shows that using HPV primary screening within the NHS Cervical Screening Programme offers a more sensitive and effective way to let women know whether they have any risk of developing cervical cancer. If the individual tested does not have high risk HPV (high risk HPV is found in 99.7% of cervical cancers), her chances of developing a cancer within five years are very small.

The UK National Screening Committee recommends that anyone experiencing any unusual symptoms, such as abnormal bleeding, should contact their general practitioner who will then decide on the most appropriate next steps and diagnostic tests.

**Cancer: Screening**

**21 October 2019 | 2721**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of women attending breast and cervical cancer screening programmes.

**Answering member: Jo Churchill**

Prevention, public health and early diagnosis are key priorities for this Government, but we acknowledge that more can be done. The recently published Independent Review of Adult Screening Programmes, conducted by Professor Sir Mike Richards, recommended that high priority should be given to wider implementation of evidence-based initiatives to increase uptake of screening programmes, including breast and cervical screening programmes. The Department, NHS England and Public Health England are now considering the findings of Professor Richards' report and will publish an implementation plan early next year.

In the interim, NHS England is investing in initiatives to help ensure equality of access to screening. These include locally-targeted interventions such as text and general practitioner (GP) reminder letters. As part of the delivery of the GP Five Year Forward View, the NHS has invested more than £258 million to

improve access to general practice including improved access to all routine appointments (including screening) at weekends and/or evenings.

## 2.3

### Early Day Motions

#### **Cervical Cancer Prevention Week (No. 3)**

**EDM (Early Day Motion)1381**

**Tabled on 20 January 2021**

**Primary Sponsor: Jim Shannon**

That this House notes that Cervical Cancer Prevention Week runs from 18 to 24 January in 2021; recognises the difficulties presented by the interruption of regular cancer screening as a result of the covid-19 pandemic; underlines the fact that cervical cancer screening is essential for every woman; and encourages women to take the emphatic advice of GP surgeries, cervical cancer charities and the Department of Health and Social Care to make an appointment for cervical cancer screening on the understanding that it will take place in a covid-safe and sterile environment.

## 3 Press material

### 3.1 News Articles

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

**Please note:** The Library is not responsible for either the views or the accuracy of external content.

[Cervical screening error numbers 'may be higher'](#)

BBC  
25 June 2021

[Woman dies after Scottish cancer screening error](#)

BBC  
24 June 2021

[Cervical Screening Awareness Week: Oldham Macmillan nurses emphasise the importance of regular smear tests](#)

Annie Owen | Mancunium Matters  
22 June 2021

[Cervical cancer: 'Waxes don't save your lives, smear tests do'](#)

BBC  
16 June 2021

[Cervical screening results leading to shame](#)

Jo's cervical cancer trust  
14 June 2021

[Home smear tests to be trialled in London, following lockdown delays](#)

Sarah Marsh | The Guardian  
24 February 2021

[Covid smear-test delays prompt calls for home HPV tests](#)

Jenifer Meierhans | BBC  
20 January 2021

## 4

## Further information

**[Evaluation of the first national ‘Cervical Screening Saves Lives’ campaign which ran in 2019](#)**

12 July 2021 | Public Health England

**[Cervical screening: programme overview](#)**

Last updated 17 March 2021 | GOV.UK

**[Report of the Independent Review of Adult Screening Programmes in England](#)**

October 2019 | NHS

**[Debate pack: E-petition 225767 on the age for cervical cancer smear tests](#)**

24 January 2019 | House of Commons Library

**[Cervical Screening](#)**

Macmillan Cancer Support

**[Screening and earlier diagnosis](#)**

NHS

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