

# What you should know about cervical screening.

## What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening is testing done on people who are at risk of getting cervical cancer, but have no symptoms and generally feel fine. The Ontario Cervical Screening Program is a screening program that encourages these people to get screened regularly. Regular cervical screening can help you avoid getting cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer is cancer in the cervix. The cervix is a body part that connects the uterus (womb) to the vagina (genital opening). Cervical cancer is almost always caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). You are **not** more likely to get cervical cancer if other people in your family have had cervical cancer.

## What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a virus that is passed from one person to another through sexual contact. Sexual contact can include many different things. In this fact sheet, it includes any time another person has contact with your genitals (private parts). This contact can be with the hands, mouth or genitals.

HPV is common and will often go away on its own without doing any harm.

There are more than 100 types of HPV and they can cause changes to the cells of the cervix. With **some** types of HPV, these cell changes can turn into cervical cancer over time if they are not treated.

## What is the cervical screening test?

The cervical screening test checks for types of HPV that can sometimes cause cervical cancer. It also checks for cell changes in the cervix caused by these types of HPV. The test does **not** check for other types of HPV.

The cervical screening test has replaced the Pap test because it is better at helping prevent cervical cancer.

## Who should get screened and how often?

The Ontario Cervical Screening Program recommends that most people who qualify for cervical screening get screened every **5 years**.

- Get screened if you:
  - Are at least 25 years old, and
  - Are a woman, Two-Spirit person, transmasculine person or nonbinary person with a cervix, and
  - Have ever had sexual contact with another person, and
  - Do not have symptoms, like different bleeding or discharge (clear or yellow fluid) from the vagina (genital opening)
- You should still get screened if you:
  - Have had the HPV vaccine
  - Feel healthy
  - Have been through menopause
  - Have not had any family members with cervical cancer
  - Have had sexual contact with only 1 person
  - Have had the same sexual partner for a long time
  - Have not had sexual contact in a long time
  - Are in a same-sex relationship



You may need to get cervical screening every **3 years** if you have a weakened immune system. For example, if you are living with HIV/AIDS or have had an organ transplant.

Cervical screening is also recommended after getting treated for cell changes in the cervix. Based on the results of this treatment, your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse or midwife will let you know how often you should get screened.

Most people can stop cervical screening from age 65 to 69. Your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse or midwife can help you decide if you should still get screened after age 69.

## What happens during the cervical screening test?

The cervical screening test feels like getting a Pap test. A doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse or midwife will use a small, soft brush to take cells from the cervix so the lab can test the cells for types of HPV and cell changes. The person doing your test can try to make the test as comfortable as possible for you.

## What happens after a cervical screening test?

You will get the result of your cervical screening test by mail. The person who did your test will also get a copy of your result and can answer any questions you may have. They can also talk with you about next steps.

Having a type of HPV that can sometimes cause cervical cancer does not necessarily mean you have cervical cancer, but you may need an exam called **cervical colposcopy** (sounds like call-*poss-ka-pee*).

Cervical colposcopy is an exam done by a specialist doctor, such as a gynecologist. During colposcopy, the specialist checks the cervix more closely than during a cervical screening test to see if anything does not look normal. Getting colposcopy can help you avoid getting cervical cancer.

## What can affect my chance of getting cervical cancer?

You can lower your chance of getting cervical cancer by getting screened regularly. Your chance of getting cervical cancer goes up as you age, if you smoke and if you have ever had sexual contact with another person. Visit [mycanceriq.ca](http://mycanceriq.ca) to find out more about what can affect your chance of getting cervical cancer.

## How to make an appointment for your test?

Call your doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse or midwife to ask them to do your test

-or-

Use Health811 any time to find a clinic that does cervical screening tests:

- Search for “cervical screening test” at [ontario.ca/healthservices](http://ontario.ca/healthservices)
- Call 811 (TTY: 1.866.797.0007)
- Use the live chat at [ontario.ca/health811](http://ontario.ca/health811)

For more information, please visit: [ontariohealth.ca/cervical-test](http://ontariohealth.ca/cervical-test)



Need this information in an accessible format? 1-877-280-8538, TTY 1-800-855-0511, [info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca).  
Document disponible en français en contactant [info@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:info@ontariohealth.ca).