

June 2025

NHS Cervical Screening Programme

Extended Screening Intervals Toolkit

This toolkit can be used to support colleagues involved in delivering cervical screening to have conversations with women and people with a cervix, attending or booking their cervical screening appointments. It can also be used by regional/local communications colleagues.

We have included a narrative to help explain the change from 3 to 5 yearly screening for those aged 25-49 who test negative for HPV, along with some FAQs to help answer questions, and new social media assets for use locally.

- 1. Narrative**
- 2. FAQs**
- 3. Social media assets**
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Narrative

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme saves thousands of lives every year by detecting abnormal cells in the cervix that could develop into cancer, if left untreated.

How often people need to have cervical screening is changing in England from 1st July 2025. Improvements in HPV testing enables the NHS to now offer a more personalised approach to preventing cervical cancer, which means those identified as lower risk won't need to be screened as frequently, and those at higher risk will continue to be monitored more regularly.

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) causes nearly all cervical cancers. Since December 2019 all cervical screening samples taken in England have been tested for high-risk HPV. It is a more sensitive and accurate test than the previous method and is the best way to find out who is at higher risk of developing the cell changes that over time could lead to cervical cancer.

At the moment, in England, women and people with a cervix aged 25-49 years are routinely invited for screening every 3 years. Now we have this better test for HPV, the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC) has recommended that those testing negative, and with no recent history of HPV, won't need to come for a cervical screening quite so often – every 5 years instead of every 3. If your cervical screening shows you have HPV, you may be invited for more frequent screenings to check HPV has cleared and if not, if any cell changes have developed.

This change is strongly backed by robust scientific evidence. Studies have shown that if a person tests negative for HPV they are extremely unlikely to go on to develop cervical cancer within the next 10 years. Research published by King's College London showed that 5-yearly screening is as safe as 3-yearly; the same number of cancers will be prevented and less frequent cervical screening tests are needed.

This move brings England into line with Scotland and Wales who have introduced this change, and with women aged 50 – 64 who are already invited every 5 years.

The positive impact of the HPV vaccination is also starting to be seen, with studies in England showing that the [HPV vaccine stops 90% of cervical cancer cases](#). The latest HPV vaccine type introduced in the UK in 2021 is predicted to further [reduce cases of women's cancer and HPV attributable deaths by 16% and 9%](#), compared to the previous vaccine type.

Even if you've had the HPV vaccination, it's important that you attend your cervical screening. Cervical screening saves lives – so make sure you come forward for your screening when you're invited, even if it was weeks, months or years ago. If you think you are due but have not yet had an invitation, speak to your GP practice.

Digital correspondence

The NHS Cervical Screening Programme has introduced [digital invitations and reminders](#) via the NHS App. Eligible people will now receive screening invitations and reminders through the NHS App when they're due. For those where a digital invitation isn't possible, a letter will be posted as a backup. All invitations will guide participants to book appointments in the usual way. We would encourage everyone to download the NHS App: www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/ and enable notifications. This digital transformation supports the NHS commitment to put patients in control of their own healthcare, making it easier to manage appointments and health needs.

Frequently Asked Questions

(NB: This can be used by sample takers, regional colleagues and national Media and Stakeholder teams)

Please note, this is not an exhaustive list of questions but a short guide to help answer those we think people will likely ask. The full [clinical pathway guidance](#) can be accessed by sample takers and service providers.

If there are any questions from individuals that you are unable to answer, please direct them to [the NHS England Customer Contact Centre](#)

Any **media enquiries** should be directed to the national NHS England Media team nhsengland.media@nhs.net

1. What is changing?

At the moment in England, women and people with a cervix aged 25-49 years are routinely invited for cervical screening every 3 years. But now we have a better test for HPV, the UK National Screening Committee (UKNSC) has recommended that those testing negative won't need to come for a cervical screening quite so often –

every 5 years instead of every 3. If your cervical screening shows you have HPV, you may be invited for more frequent screenings to monitor any cell changes.

2. Why are cervical screening intervals changing?

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) causes nearly all cervical cancers. We now use a test which is more sensitive and accurate than the previous method (smear test) to look for HPV in your sample. This helps us offer a more personalised approach by finding out who is at higher risk of developing the cervical cell changes that over time, if left untreated, could lead to cervical cancer. This change from 3 to 5 yearly screening is backed by robust scientific evidence – studies have shown that if you test negative for HPV you are extremely unlikely to go on to develop cervical cancer within the next 10 years. So now we have this better test, you don't need to be screened as often if you don't have HPV.

3. When is this change happening?

This is happening from 1st July 2025 – so anyone who is screened **on or after** this date, and tests negative for HPV, will move to 5 yearly screening unless previous screening history suggests they should be screened more regularly. If you are being screened **before** 1 July 2025 and test negative for HPV, you will stay on the current 3 yearly recall until you're next due a screen in 3 years' time.

4. Will everyone move onto this new 5 yearly screening pathway automatically?

No. Next test due dates will not be changed retrospectively; you will be invited at the interval in which you were advised of at the time of your last test.

Only those who attend cervical screening **on or after 1 July**, and meet the clinical criteria, will have their next test due date set at 5 years. NHS England made this decision based on clinical advice from experts.

Those aged 50 to 64 are already invited every 5 years.

5. So will everyone aged 25-49 move to a 5 year screening if they test negative after 1 July?

No, not everyone. If your test result is negative but your **last** test (taken within the last 5 years) showed an HPV **positive** result, you will still be invited for screening in 3 years time so that we can continue to monitor your HPV status. If you test negative for HPV at that next test, then you'll move to 5 year screening.

6. What happens if I test positive for HPV?

It's important to remember that having HPV does not mean that you have or will develop cervical cancer. It is a common virus that most people will have at some point in their life without knowing, which usually goes away on its own. If HPV is found

in your sample and there are no cell changes, you are invited for screening again in 1 year.

If cell changes are found alongside HPV, you are referred directly to a hospital clinic for a colposcopy to check the cervix more closely. Further follow up and treatment will depend on the colposcopy findings.

7. What happens if I test negative for HPV?

For most people, their screening result is normal, with no HPV detected. Screening results letters for HPV negative samples taken on or after 1st July 2025 will clearly state the date that the participant's next test will be due, which will be in 5 years.

However, if a participant tests negative for HPV, but they had a positive HPV result within the last 5 years that has not already been followed up by a negative HPV test, they will be invited for screening in **3 years**. The date of their next test will be stated in their results letter. If this test is negative, they will then be due in 5 years. This is so that we can make sure they are still HPV negative before they move to the longer interval, having had HPV in the recent past.

8. I'm currently having treatment following a colposcopy, will I be put on 5-yearly screening?

Not immediately. You will be followed up according to the reason for your treatment. Once this is completed successfully you will move to 5 yearly screening.

9. I've had cervical cancer in the past, will I be put on 5-yearly screening

Most people diagnosed with cervical cancer receive follow-up care and monitoring by their hospital cancer team instead of returning to regular screening. Those people who are diagnosed with very early cervical cancer and remain in the Cervical Screening Programme will go onto 5 year routine recall once their 10 year follow up is successfully completed.

10. I've never been for cervical screening, even though I am eligible. Will I now move onto a 5 year recall if I do decide to come for a test?

Yes, if you come for screening and test negative for HPV you will be invited again in 5 years time.

11. I'm 25 and have been invited for my first ever screening. Will I automatically go straight onto a 5 year recall if I test negative?

Yes, if you test negative for HPV at your first ever test aged 25, your next test date will be in 5 years time.

12. I haven't been for screening for a long time, I'm overdue – will I now automatically be screened every 5 years?

Only those whose most recent test result was reported as HPV negative, and where they have no recent HPV positive history, will move to 5 yearly screening.

If we don't have an HPV test result for you (because your last screening took place before the NHS started using the HPV test in 2019), your next test due date will remain set at 3 years until you come for screening, where we can check for HPV.

If you missed your last cervical screening, even if it was weeks, months or years ago, book an appointment with your GP practice now – it is not too late.

13. I've heard that I will be invited for my cervical screening through the app, but I don't have it/don't want it, what should I do?

From June 2025, you can receive cervical screening communications via the NHS App. To benefit from this, please download the NHS app and make sure your notifications are switched on. If you don't wish to use the App, we'll attempt to contact you by text message. If we can't reach you through these methods, we will send a hard-copy letter through the post, so don't worry, you won't miss an invitation.

If you have any issues with the NHS app, visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/nhs-app-help-and-support/>

14. I've had an HPV vaccination, do I still need to have cervical screening

Even if you've been vaccinated it's important that you attend your cervical screening appointment when invited because the HPV vaccine doesn't protect against all strains of HPV.

15. What happens if I move GP surgery before my next screening appointment is due?

As all cervical screening communications are sent from a central secure database, your information will be updated automatically when you register with a new GP Practice. So as long as you are registered, you will get your invitations.

Digital invitations

1. How will the new call/recall platform integrate with existing GP systems to ensure non-attenders are appropriately followed up without creating additional administrative burden?

The Cervical Screening Management System (CSMS) currently does not integrate with GP practice systems, however all GP practices should have registered to have access to it. If not, details on how to do this can be found [here](#). CSMS contains a non-responder list which GP practices can use to follow up patients.

2. When the screening invitation is sent by text will it include the NHS number?

The NHS App and SMS message does not contain the participants NHS Number, however the NHS number can be seen on the NHS App home page.

3. Can invitations be received through the airmid App, sometimes used by patients?

In line with NHS England's Priorities and Operational Guidance - [NHS England » 2025/26 priorities and operational planning guidance](#) the NHS App is the only digital product we are using to do this. All GP practices need to have enabled all core NHS App capabilities (including health record access, appointment management and patient messaging) by April 2026.

Workforce and Implementation

1. What assessment has been made of primary care capacity to deliver these screening changes, given that practices will be managing patients on different recall schedules simultaneously?

Practices have been managing patients on different recall schedules in that prior to 1st July 2025, 25-49 years were called at a different schedule to those aged 50-64 years. Practices are supported by the national call/recall system which ensures next test due dates are set and invitations are sent out at the right time. Modelling to support the implement the policy decision to change intervals for the 25-49 year old cohort suggests there will be reduction in activity years 4 and 5 post implementation, ie from 1st July 2028.

2. What monitoring systems will be in place to evaluate the impact of these changes, particularly on screening uptake rates and workforce capacity?

Routine data collection is in place to monitor attendance and cervical screening coverage rates. Data are published annually in the [NHS Cervical Screening Bulletin](#).

We have started a workforce design project that will provide a comprehensive data and understanding about the cervical screening workforce. This in turn will improve workforce and education planning for the maintenance, improvement and transformation of the NHS cervical screening programme.

Social media assets

You can use the following assets which can be downloaded from the FutureNHS Commslink: [Extended Screening Intervals - CommsLink - FutureNHS Collaboration Platform](#)

Press release

The [press release](#) is available on the NHS England news page: [NHS England » News](#)