

# Cervical screening after sexual assault: your right to important health care



## Cervical cancer and the human papillomavirus (HPV)

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers and can be successfully treated and cured, if detected early. Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by HPV, a very common sexually transmitted virus. This virus is passed on by genital skin to skin contact between people of any gender.

The body can get rid of most HPV infections naturally but if it doesn't, some types of HPV can cause changes to the cells of your cervix. If these cell changes are not picked up early and treated, they can turn into cervical cancer.

### The importance of regular cervical screening

A Cervical Screening Test looks for the presence of HPV and is the best way to prevent cervical cancer.

If you are a woman or person with a cervix aged 25 to 74 and have been sexually active with a person of any gender, it is recommended that you have a Cervical Screening Test every five years, to protect yourself against cervical cancer.

You need Cervical Screening Tests even after the HPV vaccination or menopause. Some women and people with a cervix who have had a hysterectomy will still need screening.

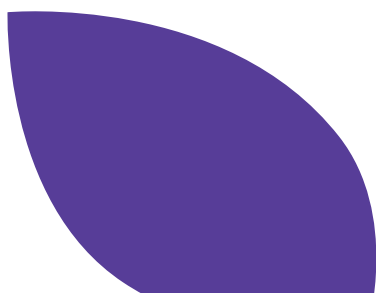
### What are your options for the Cervical Screening Test?

You can choose how you want to have your next Cervical Screening Test. Your options are:

1. collecting your own vaginal sample (self-collection) using a swab, or
2. having a healthcare provider collect your sample (clinician collected) using a speculum and small brush.

Both self-collected and clinician-collected Cervical Screening Tests are accessed through a healthcare provider and are equally effective at detecting HPV.

Some people who choose not to have a healthcare provider collect the Cervical Screening Test may find self-collection a more comfortable option.



# What is a self-collected Cervical Screening Test?

A self-collected Cervical Screening Test means you can collect your own sample from your vagina using a swab. This test is quick, easy, doesn't require a speculum examination, and is done in a private space at the doctor's or other healthcare setting, usually behind a curtain or in the bathroom. Self-collection can offer you a greater sense of control over the test.

Your healthcare provider will explain how to do the test and offer you a private place to collect the sample. Your healthcare provider can help you do the test if you need. In some cases, your healthcare provider may be able to support you to do the self-collected test at home or through Telehealth. Speak to your healthcare provider to see if this could be an option for you.

## Cervical screening for people who have experienced sexual assault

Gynaecological procedures such as the Cervical Screening Test can be particularly challenging for women and people with a cervix who have experienced sexual violence or harm.

If you are concerned about your next Cervical Screening Test there are things you can do to make it more comfortable for you.

- **You can ask to see a female healthcare provider** for your cervical screening appointment.
- **If you are concerned** about having a healthcare provider do the test, you can choose to self-collect your test.
- You can request to see a healthcare provider with **knowledge in screening people who have experienced sexual assault** or abuse. Contact your local sexual assault service by searching the map or service list on the SASVic website [www.sasvic.org.au/our-members](http://www.sasvic.org.au/our-members). You can also find a sexual assault sensitive provider near you on Cancer Council Victoria's **Cervical Screening Directory**.
- **If you feel comfortable**, you can disclose your history of sexual assault to the healthcare provider. This may help them better understand how to help you through the appointment.
- You can ask the healthcare provider to **explain the test** to you, show you the equipment they will use, and ask as many questions as you need.
- **You can ask for more than one appointment** or a longer appointment time (for example, the first visit to familiarise yourself with the healthcare providers, procedures and instruments, and the second appointment for the test itself).

- If you choose to have a healthcare provider do the test for you, you are in control and **can ask for the test to stop or pause** at any time.
- You can ask the healthcare provider for a **sheet to put over you**.
- You can **bring a friend** or support person to the appointment.
- You can try practicing some **deep breathing or listening to music** or a short podcast to help you to relax.
- You can ask to **see a counsellor** or ask for additional support if required.

Remember, your consultation will always be private and confidential.

### For more information

Call Cancer Council Victoria on 13 11 20 or visit [www.cancer.org.au/cervicalscreening](http://www.cancer.org.au/cervicalscreening).

If you would like to speak to someone in your own language, please call 13 14 50 and ask for Cancer Council Victoria.

To book a Cervical Screening Test talk to your healthcare provider. You can also use Cancer Council Victoria's **Cervical Screening Directory** to find a cervical screening provider that suits your needs including location, preference of health care provider, language spoken by the provider, disability access and sexual assault sensitive providers. Visit: [www.cancervic.org.au/cervicaldirectory](http://www.cancervic.org.au/cervicaldirectory)

If you have a history of sexual assault or abuse and need support, you can find your local specialist sexual assault service on the SASVic website [www.sasvic.org.au/our-members](http://www.sasvic.org.au/our-members). If you have experienced sexual assault and need after hours help, please contact the Sexual Assault Crisis Line on 1800 806 292.