

# HPV testing

## Information for women

### What is HPV?

HPV stands for Human Papilloma Virus.

HPV is a very common infection. Most women get the virus at some time in their life. In most cases it does not need treatment and the body will clear it on its own.

There are lots of types of HPV and most are harmless. Some types can cause cervical abnormalities. These types are known as 'high risk' HPV types. If left these abnormalities can go on to develop into cervical cancer. However, cervical abnormalities often clear up when the virus clears. In some women the virus persists and these women are at greater risk of developing cervical abnormalities (CIN) which may need treatment.

### How do people get HPV?

HPV is a very common infection amongst people who have ever been sexually active. HPV is easily transmitted during sex between both men and women and with partners of the same sex. As the virus shows no symptoms it is possible that:

Someone may have had the infection for many years without knowing about it.

A partner may have been infected many years ago and again not know.

### Why might I be tested for HPV?

#### HPV testing in women with borderline or mild dyskaryosis

HPV tests will be carried out on samples from women whose screening result shows mild abnormalities called borderline or mild dyskaryosis.

Women with borderline or mild dyskaryosis have only a 15-20% chance of having a significant abnormality that needs treatment. The HPV test is important because it is effective at identifying which women may need treatment.

If HPV is found the woman will be invited to go for colposcopy. Colposcopy is a way of looking closely at the cervix to see whether any treatment is needed. If treatment is needed the woman will usually be seen in an outpatients clinic which means that they will not need to stay overnight.

#### HPV testing in women who have received treatment for CIN

HPV tests will be carried out on samples from women who have a normal screening test result after having treatment for CIN. If HPV is not found these women do not need to return for further screening until three years later.

If HPV is found or the screening result is abnormal then these women will be invited to go for colposcopy again and will be followed up in the usual way.

### How is the HPV test done?

The test is done using the sample of cells taken during the screening test so there is no need for the woman to come back for a second test. Samples are tested in a laboratory and results are sent to the woman in writing.

### Where can I find out more information?

If you would like more information about HPV testing or anything else mentioned in this factsheet you can talk to your practice nurse, or visit the NHS Cancer Screening Programmes website at [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk)