

NHS Cervical Screening Programme

HPV testing for women following treatment for CIN

Information for women

What is HPV?

HPV stands for Human Papilloma Virus.

HPV is a very common infection of the cervix. 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. Often, cervical abnormalities 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 require treatment.

How do people get HPV?

HPV is a very common infection amongst people who have ever been sexually active. As the virus shows no symptoms it is therefore possible that:

The person 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 am I being tested for HPV following treatment for CIN?

The follow up of women who have been treated for CIN currently involves annual screening for ten years before they can be returned to routine screening. The HPV test is important because we now know that women who are HPV negative at six months following treatment, and who also have no abnormal cells found in their sample can return to a three year recall period at this time.

How is the test done?

The test is done using the sample of cells taken during your screening test so there is no need for you to come back for a second test. Samples are looked at in a laboratory and your result will be sent to you in writing.

What happens if I've got HPV?

If HPV is found in your sample or your sample shows abnormal cells you will be invited to go for colposcopy again and followed up in the usual way.

Where can I find out more about HPV?

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