

Press release: Call for women to get life-saving smear test after uptake drops

Public Health England (PHE) has issued a fresh appeal to young women to take up the invitation of a cervical cancer test as new figures published today show a fall in the number of 25 to 29-year-old women being tested.

NHS Digital statistics show a drop in the number of women of all ages being screened but worryingly only 62% of younger women took up the invitation for a test last year.

PHE is urging all eligible women (aged 25 to 64) who are invited for cervical screening (smear tests) to take the test.

Cervical screening currently prevents 70% of cervical cancer deaths. However, if everyone attended screening regularly, 83% of cases could be prevented.

Professor Anne Mackie, PHE's director of screening said:

It is of real concern that fewer women, particularly younger women are not being screened, with over a third of women under 30 not taking the test.

If women are embarrassed about having the test or worried about what the test results might say, they should talk to their GP who can explain why the test is important.

PHE is committed to improving screening attendance and has a programme of work which includes:

- supporting local services to encourage more women to attend screening by providing clearer information
- encouraging GPs to consider offering a variety of appointments earlier in the morning and evening, making it easier for women to attend at a time that suits them
- developing an interactive database which informs individual practices about the numbers of women they are screening and how they compare with neighbouring practices

Women aged 25 to 49 registered with a GP are invited every 3 years and every 5 years if aged 50 to 64. The test detects abnormalities within the cervix that could, if undetected and untreated, develop into cervical cancer. Studies show if the proportion of women screened was raised to 84% it could save the NHS £10 million a year as well as women's lives.

The Cervical Cancer Screening Programme, recommended by the UK National

Screening Committee, began in 1988 and the expert committee has reviewed the evidence every 3 years. The committee recommends the programme as it shows clear benefits and saves lives. Screening remains a choice, based on a woman's individual circumstances.

Background

1. Women over the age of 64 will no longer be invited for cervical screening unless they have had a previous abnormal result that requires a further follow up.
2. PHE's [interactive screening coverage tool](#) shows screening coverage for individual GPs and how they compare with neighbouring practices.
3. Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health.

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