

# Reviewing your cervical screening history

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You have received this information leaflet because you have requested to know results of your previous screening tests including any relevant medical investigations. We know that this is a difficult time for you and naturally you will be concerned about your treatment and future health. However, you may also be wondering why you have developed cervical cancer, especially if you have had screening tests (often known as smear tests) in the past.

Cervical screening reduces the risk of developing cervical cancer. Regular screening is the best way to detect changes to the cervix early on, but like other screening tests it is not perfect.

The cervical screening process involves many different steps which aim to identify and treat abnormal cells on the cervix to prevent cervical cancer. It may be that all steps have been followed efficiently and that a cervical cancer has developed despite the screening programme working properly. Or, it could be that at one or more of these steps, something may not have worked as well as it should. Reviewing your previous tests will help identify if anything should have been done differently.

Reviews are an essential part of every high-quality screening programme and are a routine part of the cervical screening process. Information we gather from individual cases helps to improve the programme and also helps us to learn more about how cancers develop and how they are diagnosed.

When we review your cervical screening history, we will check the letters sent to you inviting you for screening tests, your result letters and any previous medical investigations related to cervical screening.

You will be offered to fill in a consent form, stating whether you would like to know the result of the review of your previous tests and other relevant medical investigations and asked to hand to the health professional at the clinic.

If you want to know the results, we will contact you and arrange a convenient time to discuss the results when available.

### **What does the review involve?**

We review all records connected to the letters inviting you to come for screening, cervical screening tests, results letters and any previous medical investigations related to cervical screening. A group of professionals then look again at your previous tests, your medical notes related to cervical screening, and also examine whether your screening history meets national guidance.

### **What will the review show?**

In most cases, the review will show that the correct procedures have been followed and that you received appropriate care. Occasionally, the review may find that one or more steps in the process have not worked as well as they should and may highlight where we could make improvements.

### **What happens if I want to know the results of the review?**

Your doctor will let you know when the outcome is available. They can then arrange to discuss the results with you.

## **What if I don't want to know the results of the review now but change my mind later?**

We understand this is a difficult time and you may not want to receive the results of the review now. If you decide that you do want the results in the future, please contact your hospital doctor who will discuss the review with you.

## **What if I don't want to know the results of the review?**

It is completely up to you to decide whether or not you want to know the results of the review. It will not make any difference to your care.

## **Can my family ask for the results if I don't want to know?**

No. Unless you give permission, we cannot give your relatives access to any details of your medical records.

## **Could my cancer have been found earlier?**

In many cases, the cancer will have been detected at the earliest possible stage. Although cervical screening prevents a high percentage of cervical cancers (about 75%), it cannot prevent all of them. The review process aims to highlight any possible areas of weakness so we can make improvements for everyone. Some examples are given below.

Screening cannot always identify abnormal cells on a cervical sample slide because:

- Sometimes the cells do not look much different from normal cells
- There may be very few abnormal cells on the slide
- The person reading the slide may miss the abnormality (this happens occasionally, no matter how experienced the reader is)

Colposcopy (a visual examination of the cervix) cannot always identify abnormal areas of the cervix because:


- The abnormal area might not be visible during the examination
- The abnormal area might not be taken as a sample in a biopsy
- The abnormal cells might be hidden higher up inside the cervix
- Some types of abnormality are simply not easy to identify at a colposcopy

## **What happens to the information collected for my review?**

We collect screening information as part of an ongoing process. Your information (without your name) goes towards improving the systems of the programme, and to help discover more about how cancers develop and how they are diagnosed and treated. This is done whether or not you want to know the results of the review.

**Why should patients bother to go for cervical screening if abnormalities can be missed?**

Cervical screening reduces the risk of developing cervical cancer. The cervical screening programme is estimated to save 4500 lives a year nationally and regular screening is the best way to detect early changes to the cervix.



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