

the lesbian guide to

CERVICAL SCREENING

lasi

lesbian advocacy
services initiative

WHY DO I NEED CERVICAL SCREENING?

Despite myths surrounding lesbian women and cervical screening, you still need to get tested when you're called for your cervical smear test.

HPV, like other sexually transmitted infections, can be passed between women through oral sex, transferring vaginal fluids on hands and fingers and sharing sex toys without using a condom.

This means that even lesbian women need to have their screen test done – not just straight and bisexual women.

It's not uncommon for lesbian women to have had penetrative sex with a man at some time in their lives, so even if it was just once or a long time ago, you still could have been exposed to HPV by having sex with a man at some point.

From Jan 2011 all women aged 25 – 49 in Northern Ireland will be called for screen tests every three years and women between 50-64 will be called every 5 years. If you're under 25 and over 64 you won't be called automatically but if you're worried about anything talk to your GP about having the test done.

A cervical screen test is not a test for cancer, rather, it is a test for changes in the cells of your cervix or the lower part of your womb. Changes here can be caused by the HPV virus, which accounts for more than 70% of all cervical cancers..

DID YOU KNOW...

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the virus that causes cervical cancer and it is so common that 8 out of every 10 people will catch it in their lifetime.

How does this affect you?

A screen test can detect these changes before cancer has even developed; this means that by going for your regular screen tests you can prevent yourself from getting cervical cancer.

REMEMBER: Early detection of cell changes in your cervix means you can stop cancer developing.

What happens at my screen test?

Many lesbians say they prefer a female doctor – if you feel more comfortable with a woman doing the procedure, it's best to ask when you are making the appointment to make sure they know your preference before you come in. The best time to have your screen test done is 14 days after the start of your last period.

It's advised that you don't have sex for 24 hours before the test; this is to make the test as accurate as possible. If you are going to have sex, make sure you don't use lube that contains spermicide (such as KY Jelly) or condoms on your sex toys, as the chemicals in them can lead to an inaccurate test result.

During the test you'll be asked to undress from the waist down and the nurse or doctor taking your test will explain the procedure and ask you a few questions. The NHS does not currently monitor sexual orientation so you shouldn't be asked any questions about that.

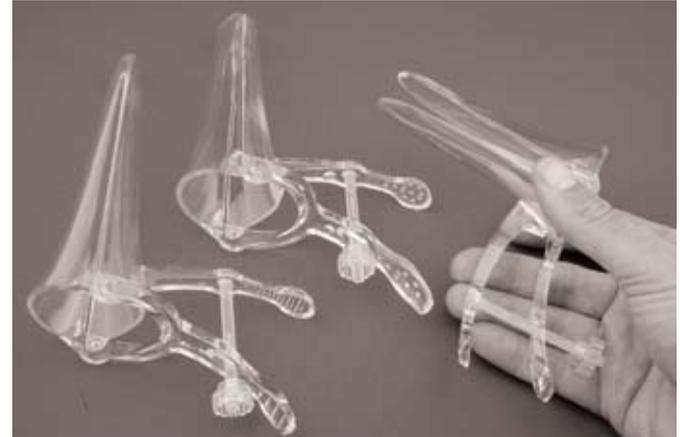
However, women have reported being asked questions that are only relevant to straight women, like being asked what form of contraceptive you use. You can use this as an opportunity to tell your doctor about your sexual orientation to ensure you get the most relevant information possible.



75%

of cancers can be prevented through regular screening.

The procedure for the test is simple and most women report that it was painless but a little uncomfortable. The doctor will use a small, plastic device called a speculum that's used to gently widen the opening of your vagina so she/he can see the cervix and take a sample using a small rubber brush. The sample is sent for testing and results usually come back within 3 weeks.



REMEMBER: You need to phone back for your results, as they are not usually posted. Don't assume that your test was clear if you haven't heard anything.

Things to talk to your GP about

- That Lesbians who haven't had sex with a man can still be exposed to HPV
- Be honest about your full sexual history
- Any fears you have about the procedure
- Advice on safer sex

Contact us if you'd like support with talking to your GP.

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