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Soon you're going to be having your 20th birthday and this means you will be shortly receiving an invitation to attend your first cervical screen. You may already know about the screening programme or this might be the first time you've heard about it. Either way this provides a brief introduction to the programme and answers questions you may have.

#### What is cervical screening?

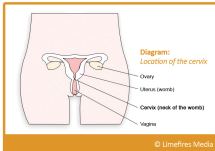
Cervical screening is a test looking for changes to cells in the cervix (the entrance to the womb) which if not found may eventually develop into cervical cancer. Cervical screening is not a test for cancer but **substantially reduces the risk of it developing in the future**.

#### Why am I being invited?

Cervical screening **saves hundreds of lives each year**. When you turn 20 you will be invited to attend screening every three years. Women are invited to attend screening until the age of 64. Approximately 75% of cervical cancer can be prevented by women regularly attending the **Scottish Cervical Screening Programme**.

#### What causes changes to cells in the cervix?

The changes to the cells in the cervix are caused by Human Papillomavirus (HPV) a very common **symptomless virus spread through sexual contact**. Approximately 80% of women will have the virus during their lifetime. For most people the symptomless virus disappears by itself but in some women it may cause changes to the cells in the cervix increasing the risk of developing cervical cancer.



#### But I've had the HPV (cervical cancer) vaccine?

The HPV vaccine doesn't offer protection against all cervical cancer. **Approximately 30% of cervical cancer is not prevented by the vaccine**. Even though you've had the vaccine you are still at risk of cervical cancer and so you will still be invited to attend screening.

#### Why 20? What is the risk to 20 year olds?

You are now entering the age group (20-30 years) at **greatest risk** of having changes to cells in the cervix, which over time can develop into cervical cancer. Whilst cervical cancer is most common in women aged 30 to 45, it can affect women of all ages.

#### Why is it important that I go for the test?

The biggest risk factor for being diagnosed with cervical cancer is never having attended screening. Women who do not attend screening are more likely to go on to develop cervical cancer as it is not detected. Screening can detect early changes in cells which can be **easily treated** before they can possibly develop into cervical cancer.

#### But I feel OK?

HPV and changes to cells in the cervix don't have any symptoms so the screening test is designed to detect the disease at an early stage in women who feel well.

#### Do I have to be sexually active to get it?

Anyone who has ever had **any type of sexual contact with a man or woman** is at risk of having been exposed to HPV. Just one sexual contact is enough to put you at risk of developing changes to cells in the cervix. **Using a condom offers very limited protection from catching HPV.**

#### What do I need to do?

Keep a look out for your invitation which will be posted shortly. This will provide details of how to arrange an appointment and include a leaflet which provides in-depth information about the test. If you do not receive an invitation, please contact your GP or practice nurse who will be able to advise you further.

#### What happens at the test?

The test will take about five minutes. During the test a sample of cells will be taken from your cervix using a **small specially-designed brush**. This is a **routine test** and you can ask for a female doctor or nurse. If you want, you are able to take a friend or relative to the test with you.

*"I was really worried about attending but I went for cervical screening and it wasn't anywhere near as bad as I thought it would be"*  
*Woman attending screening for the first time*

#### Where do I go for the test?

The test is normally done at your GP surgery or you may be offered the opportunity to attend a local family planning clinic.

#### I've got another question ... where can I get more information?

This is just to introduce cervical screening. If you have any questions or worries after receiving your invitation letter in a few weeks you can talk to your doctor or nurse before you book your test, no matter how big or small your worries are. Don't feel you need to worry about this by yourself. You can also find more information on the NHS Health Scotland website:

[www.healthscotland.com/topics/health-topics/screening/cervical.aspx](http://www.healthscotland.com/topics/health-topics/screening/cervical.aspx)