

HIV & your cervix

Looking after your cervical health



Newly diagnosed with HIV?

It's recommended you have a review of your cervical screening history with your doctor to make sure you are up to date with the recommended three yearly screening guidelines for PLHIV.

HPV and HIV - the facts

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that can be passed through skin to skin contact, usually during sexual activity.

Most people only know they have been exposed to HPV if they develop genital warts (which are caused by some HPV types) or if they have HPV detected on a cervical screening test.

Most of the time HPV clears up by itself and we never know we had it. Sometimes HPV doesn't clear itself and hangs on in our bodies, which has the risk of causing small cell changes, called precancers which can go on, usually over a long time, to develop into cancer. HPV is a known risk factor for developing cervical cancer.

For women and people living with HIV (PLHIV) who have a cervix, the risk of developing cervical cancer is roughly five times higher than people who are HIV-negative.

PLHIV are also at greater risk for other HPV related cancers of the head and neck, vulvar, vagina and anus. Ask your doctor about other HPV-related cancers.

It is recommended that PLHIV have a cervical screening test every three years

HPV Vaccination

Some types of HPV can be prevented by vaccination. You may already have received the HPV vaccine. If you are unsure or have not received the HPV vaccination, we recommend you discuss your HPV vaccination options with your doctor.

It is recommended that all PLHIV receive the HPV vaccination (Gardasil9). This is a new vaccine that reduces your risk against nine HPV types. The previous vaccine protected you against four different types of HPV.

If you are 19 years or over or you were previously vaccinated with the older HPV vaccination, the cost of the Gardasil9 vaccine is \$460 over the vaccination course.

You can be revaccinated with the nine valent vaccine to provide further protection.

What's it like to get a cervical screen?

The cervical screening test is usually collected in the same way as a Pap test.

The doctor or nurse will take you to a private room and ask you to remove your clothing below your waist and lie down on the bed. When you are comfortable the doctor or nurse will gently insert a speculum into your vagina so they can swab your cervix with a long small brush. It usually takes a few minutes.

This is your cervical screening test. You can ask your doctor questions anytime and to explain how the test works.

Once the swab is completed, your sample of cells will be sent to a pathology lab to look for HPV.

Your doctor or nurse will explain to you how you will get your results. Results can take up to two weeks.

There is a new option for people to self swab. This is available to people aged 30+ who have never been screened, or are two or more years overdue for screening, and who are not comfortable with a speculum. This test is just as accurate. If this option is suitable for you, talk to your health care provider.

If you have received the HPV vaccination, you'll still need regular cervical screening tests as the vaccination does not protect you from all types of HPV virus

Cervical screening guidelines

It is recommended that PLHIV with a cervix who are between the ages of 25–75 years have a cervical screening test (previously known as Pap Smear but now replaced by a more accurate and modern test to detect HPV) every three years if your last test result was normal (i.e. HPV-negative).

If you are aged between 20–24 years and have lived with HIV for five years or more, you might need to have the cervical screening test sooner. Talk with your HIV specialist for advice about a cervical screening test.

If you have a Medicare card, and visit a clinic that bulk-bills, your cervical screening test may be free of charge.

Screening Reminders

PLHIV are recommended to get a cervical screening test every three years. It might be a good idea to write what year and month you are next due for a cervical screen and save it in your calendar or write it down somewhere safe.

You may also receive a reminder in the mail from the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR). You can call the NCSR on 1800 627 701 to check if you are registered, access your screening status and history, defer your next screening date or ask not to receive reminders.

Checklist to discuss with your doctor

1. Guidelines for cervical screening for PLHIV
2. HPV Vaccination
3. Screenings Reminders
4. Vaginal, vulvar and anal screening for HPV-related cancers



Acknowledgements: Positive Life NSW HPV Working Group Members

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For more information phone 02 9206 2177 or 1800 245 677 (freecall) or visit www.positivelife.org.au