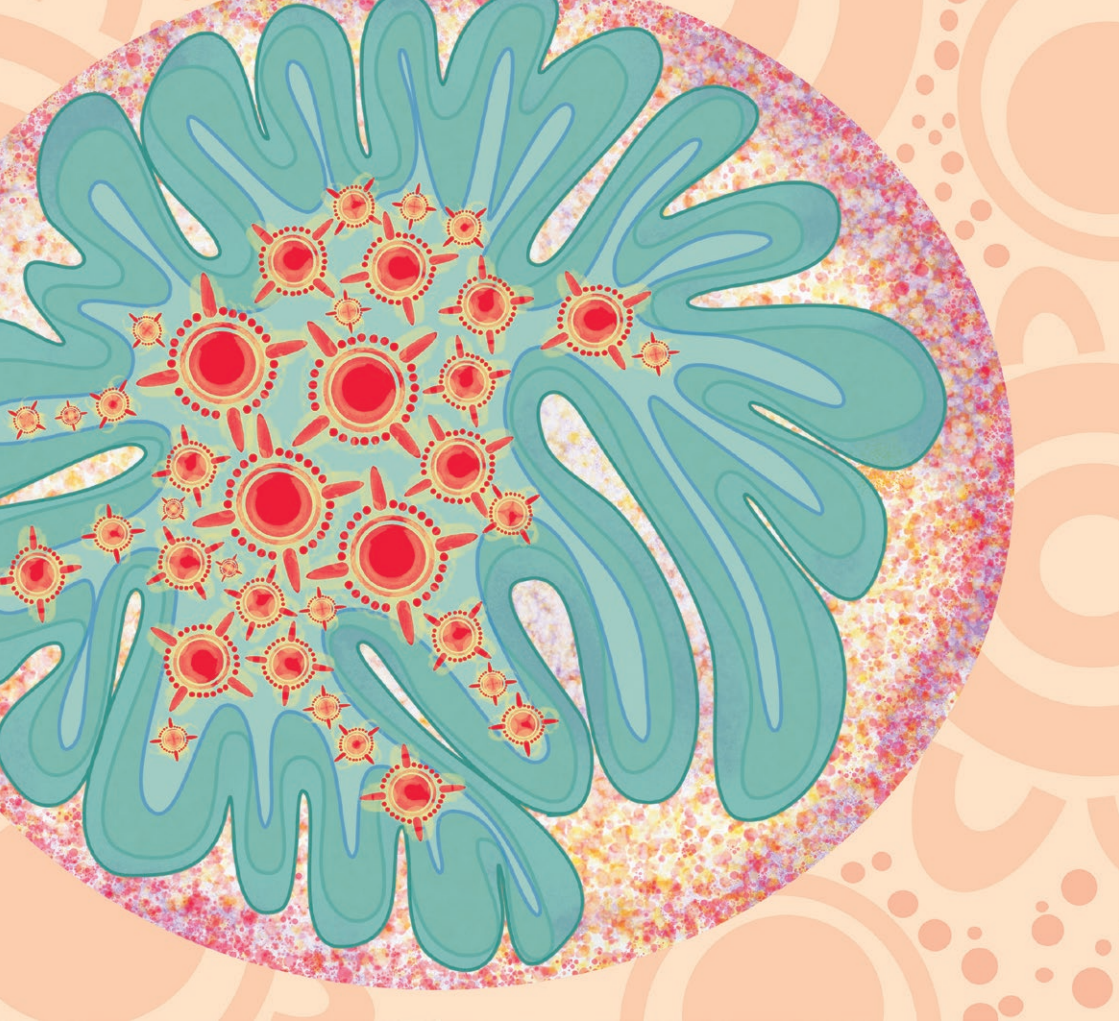




Women's Business

Cervical Screening





Life can get busy looking after our family and the rest of our mob, but it's also important to look after ourselves.

This includes keeping our body healthy and getting our health checks done regularly.

One of the regular tests that we should do is the Cervical Screening Test, which used to be known as the Pap test.

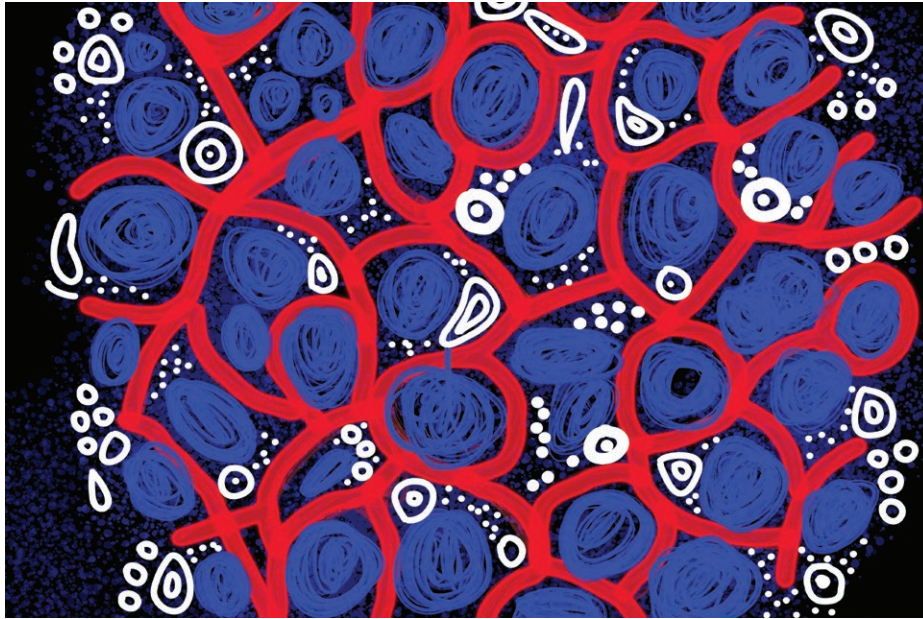
The Cervical Screening Test checks the health of your cervix.

The cervix is inside your body at the top of your vagina and is the opening of your uterus (womb).

The Cervical Screening Test is one of the best ways to prevent cervical cancer by finding changes years before they become cancer.

Most of these changes are caused by a common virus called the human papillomavirus (also known as HPV). HPV is passed on through sexual activity.

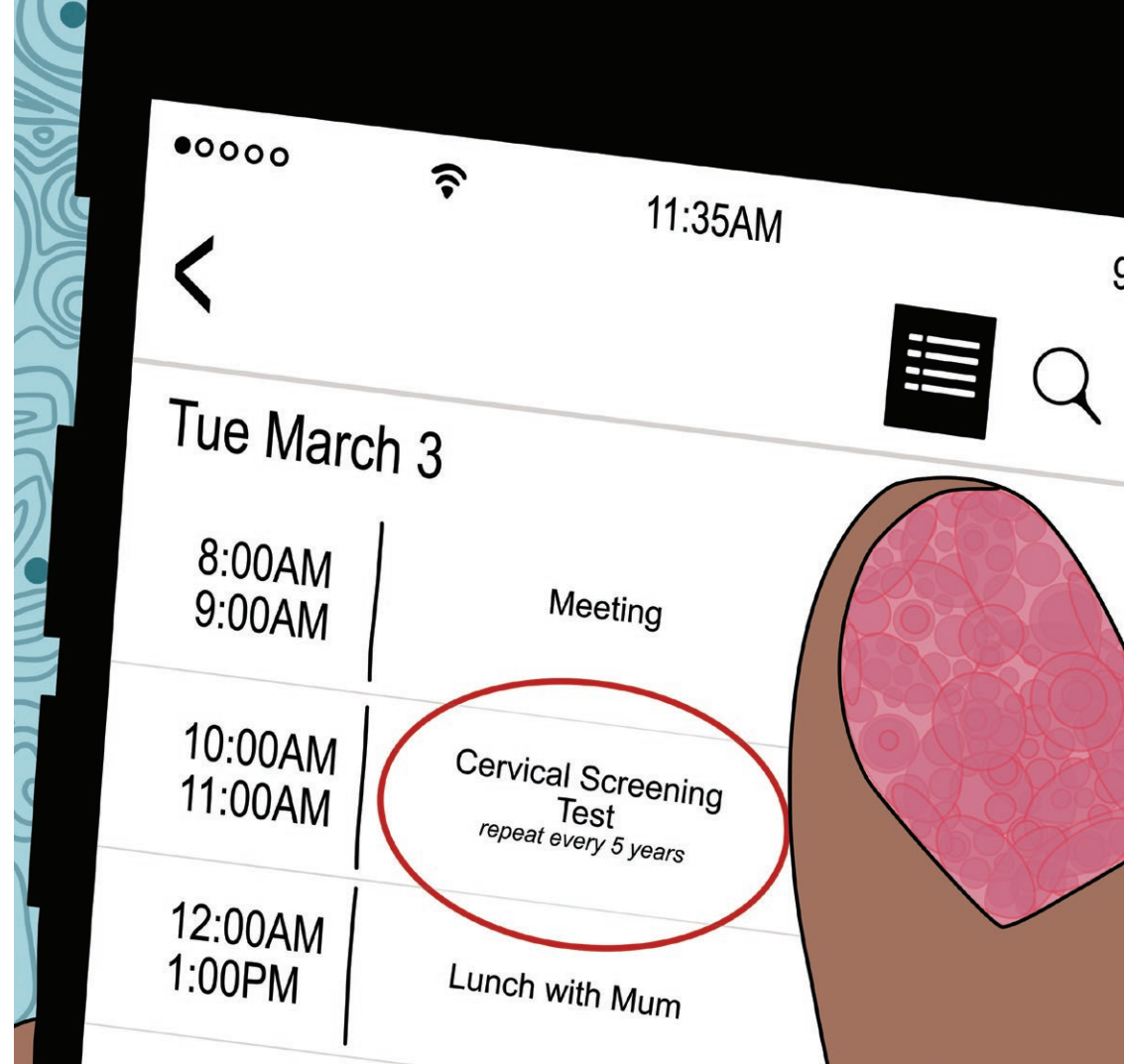




The Cervical Screening Test looks for HPV infection so that it can be found early, before it has a chance to become cervical cancer.

The body can get rid of most HPV infections naturally, but if it doesn't, some types of HPV can cause changes to the cells of your cervix.

If these changes are not picked up early, they can develop into cervical cancer, but this usually takes over 10 years.



If you have a cervix, are **aged 25 to 74** and have ever had sexual contact with anyone it is recommended that you have a Cervical Screening Test every five years, even if you are no longer sexually active.



The Cervical Screening Test is available through **a doctor or nurse at your Aboriginal health service or regular doctor's practice.**

There are two ways of having the test:

- you can collect it yourself – this option is called self-collection, or
- the doctor or nurse can collect the test sample.

You can ask for a female doctor or nurse when booking your Cervical Screening Test.

The test is free but there could be a cost for your doctor's visit. You can ask when booking the appointment.

If you choose to collect your own test sample, you take your own sample from the vagina using a swab that looks like a long cotton bud. Your doctor or nurse will explain how to do the test and be there to help you if you need.

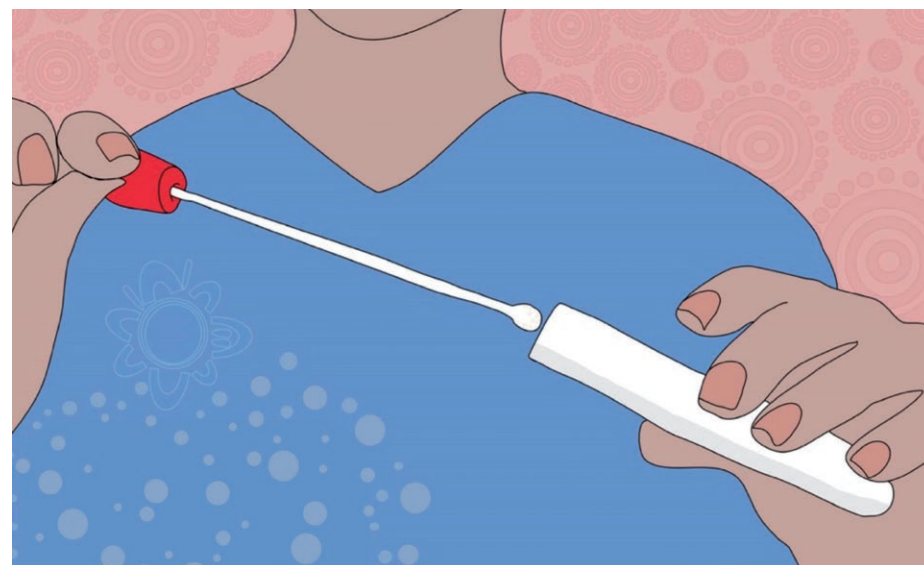
This is called a **self-collected Cervical Screening Test.**

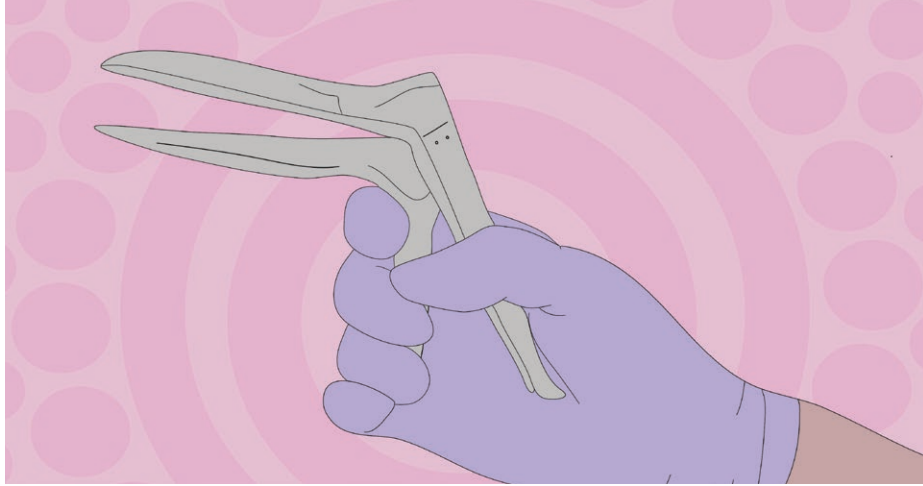
It is best if you take your sample at your health service or general practice. You can take your own sample behind a privacy curtain or in a bathroom. It is quick and easy to do.

You may be able to take your test at home. You can discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

The self-collected Cervical Screening Test is as reliable as the test done by your nurse or doctor.

If the test is positive for HPV, then another test is needed that looks for any changes to the cells of the cervix.





If you want the doctor or nurse to collect your test sample, you will be given privacy to undress, and asked to lie on an examination table with your underwear off. You will have a sheet or blanket to put over you from the waist down. The whole examination should take **less than 10 minutes.**

The doctor or nurse will use an instrument called a **speculum** to gently open your vagina and take a test sample from your cervix using a small brush. If anything is uncomfortable, please tell the doctor or nurse so they can help you. There are some things you can do to help you feel more comfortable about doing the test:

- You can take a friend or relative along with you.
- You can ask your nurse or doctor to stop or pause the test at any time.
- You can tell the doctor or nurse if you felt pain or were worried when you had your last speculum examination.

Remember it is your body and you are in control.



Once you have completed your Cervical Screening Test, the doctor or nurse will send the test away to the laboratory for processing.

Your doctor, nurse or Aboriginal Health Worker will contact you about the results of your test, or you might get a letter in the mail.

If your test shows that HPV is present, then your doctor, nurse or Aboriginal Health Worker will let you know what to do next.



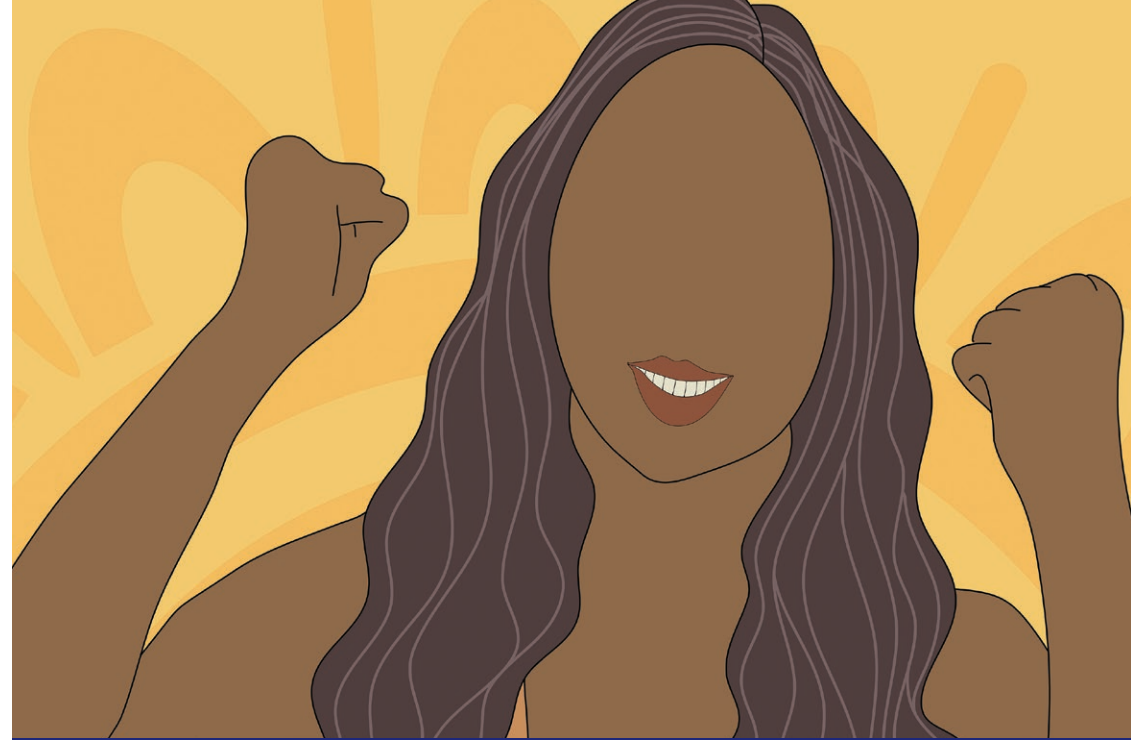
The HPV vaccine helps to protect against cancers caused by HPV, including cervical cancer.

HPV is common, it usually causes no symptoms and goes away by itself, but sometimes leads to serious illness.

HPV causes almost all cases of cervical cancer and genital warts, as well as mouth and throat cancers, cancers of the penis, anus, vagina and vulva.

You still need to have regular Cervical Screening Tests even if you've had the HPV vaccine because the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

Luckily our young sistas and young brothers can get vaccinated for HPV at school, usually in Year 7. The vaccine is most effective before a person becomes sexually active. If you don't know if your young sistas or brothers have been vaccinated against HPV you can ask your doctor or nurse.



6 key messages

- 1 Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.
- 2 Cervical cancer can be prevented through regular Cervical Screening Tests.
- 3 You have the choice to do a self-collected Cervical Screening Test yourself or have a test sample collected by a doctor or nurse.
- 4 Cervical screening is important for all women and people with a cervix who have ever been sexually active, aged 25 to 74.
- 5 The Cervical Screening Test should be done every five years.
- 6 The HPV vaccine is a great way to protect our mob.

Book your Cervical Screening Test

Make an appointment with your doctor or nurse at your Aboriginal health service or regular doctor's practice.

Or find a provider at cancervic.org.au/CervicalDirectory.

To find out more about cervical screening call the Cancer Council Victoria on **13 11 20**.

More information

www.cancervic.org.au/about/aboriginal-communities

www.cancervic.org.au/cancer-information

www.hpvvaccine.org.au

www.vaccho.org.au/cancer-and-screening

Artist Madison Connors is a Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Gamilaroi woman who has created art on the importance of cervical screening.

A note on terminology This book is for women and people with a cervix. We use this inclusive language because not everyone with a cervix identifies as a woman.