

## **SAMPLETAKER UPDATE: CERVICALCHECK REPEAT TESTS**

Many women\* who were unable to attend cervical screening in 2020 had their cervical screening test earlier this year. This led to a larger than expected number of samples taken.

However, like many other healthcare services, COVID-19 infection control measures have affected our ability to provide care. When we received this unusually high number of samples, COVID-19 social distancing requirements meant it was not possible to increase staff numbers in our sorting centre to enable all samples to be processed in a timely manner.

As a result, about 200 women of around 200,000 women who had a sample taken in the first half of 2021, and who had HPV found, are now being asked to book a repeat cervical screening test. This is to enable a follow-up test (cytology) to be taken, to check for cell changes.

### **What follow-up testing means**

- Cervical screening first looks to see if you have any of the high-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause cervical cancer. If HPV is found, your same test sample will be checked to see if you have any abnormal (pre-cancerous) cells in your cervix. This is a new way of screening. It is called HPV cervical screening.
- Having HPV does not mean you have cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is a rare outcome of a HPV infection.
- However, if your results show you have a HPV infection, a follow-up test (cytology) is done to see if HPV has caused any changes to the cells in the cervix.
- Many people with HPV (around six in 10) have no changes detected on follow-up. However, if the follow-up test shows abnormal cells are present in the cervix (around four in 10 people), a further test, called a colposcopy, is needed.

### **What is an expired sample?**

While we can test for HPV up to six months after a sample is taken, the follow-up test to check for abnormal cells (cytology test) must be done within 42 days of the sample being taken.

On this occasion, an expired sample is one that required follow-up testing for abnormal cervical cells, but this could not be completed within 42 days.

### **What we are doing:**

- We are writing to the women affected by this issue, and their GPs, to ask them to book a repeat test.
- We are letting women know when this repeat test should be taken, and that the test is free.
- We will prioritise repeat tests in our laboratories.

- If your practice is affected we will let you know. We will send you a label marked 'Urgent' to put on the sample box so we can prioritise the test result.
- Payment will be processed for these repeat tests.
- **We will send women and their GPs a results letter four to six weeks after their repeat test is taken.**

Women who have already received a screening test result this year and who have not been asked to book a repeat test in three months' time are not affected.

### **Repeat cervical screening test**

Repeat tests should be at least three months after the date of the last test taken. We need to wait three months so that the cells in the cervix have time to grow back and we can get the best samples. This repeat cervical screening test will be free of charge with any [GP or sample taker registered with CervicalCheck](#).

We are asking the women affected to:

- check the date of their last test
- make an appointment with their GP or sample taker at least three months after the date of their last test
- bring their letter with them to their next test.

We remind all our participants that no screening test is 100% accurate and some people will still develop cervical cancer despite attending for screening. This is why it is so important that you attend for cervical screening each time you are invited. We ask them also to pay attention to possible symptoms such as pelvic pain, irregular vaginal bleeding, spotting or unusual discharge and go to their doctor if they have any symptoms.

We apologise for the inconvenience and any concern this may cause women and their sample takers.

For more information women can check the CervicalCheck website, [www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck](http://www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck) or call CervicalCheck's Freephone line on **1800 45 45 55** or contact [info@cervicalcheck.ie](mailto:info@cervicalcheck.ie)

\*In using the words 'woman' and 'women', we refer to any person who has a cervix.

**Ends**