

The National Screening Service launches LGBT+ Cervical Screening Study

Report highlights positive experiences and key barriers to LGBT+ people accessing cervical screening

The National Screening Service today (Monday, September 13) launches its report entitled [LGBT+ Cervical Screening Study](#), in partnership with LINC - a non-governmental organisation working with lesbian and bisexual women and their families, and CervicalCheck – the national cervical screening programme.

This study examines the knowledge of; attitudes towards; participation in; and experiences of cervical screening in Ireland. It was open to lesbian and bisexual women, trans men, non-binary, and intersex people.

Approximately 450 people who identify as LGBT+ took part in this study, between October 2020 and March 2021.

It was found that while the majority have said they had positive experiences of cervical screening, only about two thirds (or 66%) of people said they attended cervical screening regularly. This compares to 80% attendance by the general population.

Dr Sarah Fitzgibbon, Primary Care Clinical Advisor for CervicalCheck said: "One finding that stands out is the inaccurate information circulating in the LGBT+ community that cervical screening may not be necessary for them. CervicalCheck invites every person with a cervix in Ireland aged 25-65 years for free cervical screening, every three or five years depending on age. The aim of the programme is to detect abnormalities in the cervix that, if left untreated, could develop into cancer. Therefore it's important that everyone who is invited attends."

Anyone with a cervix is at risk from cervical cancer and should avail of regular screening (HSE.ie, 2020). International evidence, spanning more than two decades and from a broad range of countries, demonstrates that

lesbian and bisexual (LB) women and gender minorities with a cervix (GMC) have significantly lower rates of uptake of HPV and cervical screening. This study sets out to examine the situation in Ireland against this backdrop.

The main barriers to attending screening were found to be: heteronormative assumptions made by healthcare professionals regarding their circumstances; the person being asked heterosexual questions by healthcare professionals which did not accurately reflect their gender identity, and fear of the test procedure itself. Over 62% of those surveyed do not state their gender/sexual identity when attending for screening.

LINC member and cervical screening advocate Ruth O'Mahony said: "A number of lesbian and bisexual women think they don't need to go for screening because they are not having sex with men. And just like women in the community as a whole, many also don't like the invasiveness of the procedure. A positive experience with your GP can help you focus on taking care of your body. And if you can see yourself represented in the information being given out about female health, you'll be more likely to consider it's for you."

Dr Nóirín Russell, Clinical Director, for CervicalCheck said: "Following the publication of this report, CervicalCheck is committed to a number of actions, such as: increased training and supports for sample takers; inclusion of and communication with the LGBT+ community in cervical screening; more targeted messaging and campaigns for the LGBT+ community, working in partnership with the people we care for in screening; and further research."

We look forward to implementing these recommendations alongside our partners in LINC and the wider LGBT+ community.