

## CervicalCheck FAQ 24 June 2021

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### Q. What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening checks the health of your cervix (the opening to your womb from your vagina). It's not a test for cancer; it's a test to help prevent cancer from developing.

A person's cervical screening test sample is checked for human papillomavirus (HPV) – a virus that can cause cervical cancer.

If HPV is found, the same test sample is checked to see if you have any abnormal (pre-cancerous) cell changes in your cervix.

If HPV is not found we do not need to check your cells. This is because your risk of developing cell changes is very low.

#### **This way of screening:**

- is a better way of cervical screening
- prevents more cancers
- means some people will have fewer unnecessary tests

More information about cervical screening can be found [here](#).

### Q. Who is invited for screening?

*Cervical screening* is free to all women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 65 who live in *Ireland*. People within this age range do not need to wait for an invitation to book a test. You can check the register at [www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck](http://www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck) and book a test when you are due.

- If you're between 25 and 29 years of age, you will usually have a cervical screening test every 3 years.
- If you're between 30 and 65 years of age, you will usually have a cervical screening test every 5 years.

### Q. How common is cervical cancer in Ireland?

In women and people with a cervix who attend regularly for screening the lifetime risk of developing cervical cancer are 2 per 1,000 people. For women and people with a cervix who do not attend for screening, the lifetime risk of developing cervical cancer is 19 per 1,000 people.

### Q. I have had a hysterectomy, do I still need to be invited for screening?

If you have had a hysterectomy, you may need to continue to have screening tests if:

- you have had a subtotal hysterectomy (uterus removed) and still have a cervix
- changes in the cells in your cervix were detected before surgery

- there were cell changes on your cervix at the time of surgery
- the hysterectomy was for treating cervical abnormalities (cancer or pre-cancerous conditions)
- the histology of the cervix is unknown.

If you are unsure what type of hysterectomy you had, you should ask your GP/ hospital consultant to review your hospital medical records to clarify.

CervicalCheck does not hold your medical history or your records and is not able to advise you on the type of hysterectomy you have had, or your cervical screening needs following a hysterectomy.

For more information you can contact CervicalCheck's Freephone line on **1800 45 45 55** or contact [info@cervicalcheck.ie](mailto:info@cervicalcheck.ie)

#### **Q. I had a hysterectomy and opted out of screening – was this the right thing to do?**

This depends on the type of hysterectomy you've had:

- **Total hysterectomy:** If you have had a total hysterectomy, your GP or hospital consultant will advise you if you should continue to have screening tests. A total hysterectomy is when the uterus and cervix are removed.
- **Subtotal hysterectomy:** If you have had a subtotal hysterectomy you should continue to have cervical screening. A subtotal hysterectomy is where the cervix is retained.

It should be noted that most hysterectomies carried out in Ireland are total hysterectomies – which involve removing the cervix.

#### **Q. How do I find out what type (total or subtotal) hysterectomy I have had?**

We know that most hysterectomies carried out in Ireland are total hysterectomies, which involve removing the cervix. However, if you have had a hysterectomy, you may need to continue to have screening tests if:

- you have had a subtotal hysterectomy (uterus removed) and still have a cervix
- changes in the cells in your cervix were detected before surgery
- there were cell changes on your cervix at the time of surgery
- the hysterectomy was for treating cervical abnormalities (cancer or pre-cancerous conditions)
- the histology of the cervix is unknown.

If you have opted out of screening due to hysterectomy and would like more information you can contact CervicalCheck's Freephone line on 1800 45 45 55 or contact [info@cervicalcheck.ie](mailto:info@cervicalcheck.ie)

#### **Q. What is a total hysterectomy?**

A total hysterectomy is when the uterus and cervix are removed. If you have had a total hysterectomy, your doctor will be able to tell you if you should continue to have screening tests or if it is safe for you to opt out of screening.

**Q. What is a subtotal hysterectomy?**

A subtotal hysterectomy is where the cervix is retained. If you have had a subtotal hysterectomy you should not apply to CervicalCheck to opt out cervical screening.

If the cervix is retained you should continue to come for screening when you are due.

**Q. I was told I had a total hysterectomy but still had to go for a cervical screening test. Why?**

If abnormal cells were found before or at the time of your hysterectomy, your gynaecologist (hospital doctor) will advise you whether you need to have further screening tests. Sometimes it is necessary to take a sample from the top of your vagina if you have previous evidence of cervical cell abnormalities. This is called a vault smear.

**Q. I am a trans man and had a hysterectomy. Do I still need to come for cervical screening?**

If you have had a total hysterectomy to remove your cervix, you might still need cervical screening if any abnormal cells before or at hysterectomy. If you are aged 25 to 65 and still have a cervix, you should attend cervical screening.

**Q. How do I opt out of screening following a hysterectomy?**

- There is no automatic process for removing women from our screening register.
- If a person wants to opt out the screening register – for personal or medical reasons such as a hysterectomy – please contact the programme and request an opt out form.
- When a person requests an opt out form due to having had a hysterectomy, they are advised to confirm with their GP/ hospital consultant that they no longer require a cervical screening test. Their GP / consultant will review their notes to clarify.
- The form can be signed by the person or their GP and returned to CervicalCheck.
- Once the form has been received and checked by CervicalCheck, the person will no longer receive invites for cervical screening from CervicalCheck.

**Q. How does a person know they have been removed from the screening register?**

We do not automatically remove any women from our register post hysterectomy. The removal only happens at the request of the woman or her doctor. We will send you a letter to let you know we have received your completed Post Hysterectomy opt out form which has been signed by you. We will let you know when we have amended our records and you will not receive any further correspondence from CervicalCheck.

**Q. How do I know if a similar problem has occurred in Ireland and I have been affected?**

In Scotland, the cervical screening programme receives an automatic notification when women and people with a cervix have a hysterectomy. The Scottish cervical screening programme removes them from the screening register and they are no longer invited to attend for screening.

In Ireland, the screening programme does not get an automatic notification when a participant has a hysterectomy. It does not remove anyone from the register unless directed to do so by the participant or by their doctor on behalf of the participant.

In Ireland, people who have had a hysterectomy can request a form from CervicalCheck to allow them to opt out of the screening register. People will only be taken off the register when the form is signed to confirm that the hysterectomy was a total hysterectomy. This confirmation should be from their GP or hospital consultant that screening is not required.

**NOTE:** Since March 2020 when HPV screening was introduced, the CervicalCheck laboratories can review the forms received from GPs. They can give notification to a participant's GP that no further screening is required if the form accompanying the woman's sample to the lab indicates that she has had a total hysterectomy. We have suspended this activity pending a full review of our processes.

**Q. How do I check if I was right to opt to come off the screening register?**

If you are seeking more information you can contact CervicalCheck's Freephone line on **1800 45 45 55** or contact [info@cervicalcheck.ie](mailto:info@cervicalcheck.ie)

It should be noted that most hysterectomies carried out are total hysterectomies, which involve removing the cervix; therefore the risk of developing abnormal cell changes after hysterectomy is low.

If a person has any concerns or symptoms, we strongly encourage them to contact or attend their GP to ensure that they are given the appropriate advice or referral. A list of symptoms is available on our website [here](#).

**Q I have had a hysterectomy, can I still opt out of the CervicalCheck programme?**

We understand that people who have undergone a hysterectomy and have opted out of the cervical screening programme may have concerns around their care. We have begun a process to consider any potential implications for Ireland from the Scottish experience and we will provide updates on our progress when available.

Until this review is complete we have paused any options to remove women from the register due to having had a hysterectomy. People will continue to be invited for cervical screening when they are due.

We will update our website / contact you when we are ready to resume processing opt out requests.

**Q What happened in Scotland, could the same thing have happen in Ireland?**

A review of cervical screening records in Scotland has found that a number of people had been removed incorrectly from that country's population screening programme following hysterectomy procedures.

The Scottish cervical screening programme receives an automatic notification when women and people with a cervix have a hysterectomy. The programme removes them from the

screening register and they are no longer invited to attend for screening. The review found that people who had undergone a subtotal hysterectomy (where the cervix is retained) had been removed incorrectly from the screening register.

Unlike Scotland, Ireland does not remove women automatically from the CervicalCheck screening register after hysterectomy.

In Ireland, CervicalCheck receives no automatic notification when someone has a hysterectomy. Instead, people who have had a hysterectomy can request a form from

CervicalCheck to allow them to opt out the screening register. People will only be taken off the register when the form is signed to confirm that the hysterectomy was a total hysterectomy. This confirmation should be from their GP or hospital consultant that screening is not required.

CervicalCheck informs those who have had a hysterectomy that they may need to continue to have screening tests if:

- they have had a subtotal hysterectomy (uterus removed) and still have a cervix
- changes in the cells in your cervix were detected before surgery
- there were cell changes on your cervix at the time of surgery
- the hysterectomy was for treating cervical abnormalities (cancer or pre-cancerous conditions)
- the histology of the cervix is unknown.

Nonetheless, the HSE is examining the findings of the Scottish review and considering these in an Irish context. The analysis will take place across the relevant areas of the HSE.

**Q. I had a hysterectomy but have never come for screening.**

If you have had a hysterectomy but have never come for screening / are not on the CervicalCheck register / had a hysterectomy prior to 2008 when CervicalCheck began, you should talk to your GP about whether screening is right for you. If you are over 65, there is no role for commencing further with screening but you may wish to have a gynaecological exam performed.

**Q How many women who have had a hysterectomy have gone on to develop abnormal cells / cervical cancer?**

This is a rare occurrence. Women who have a total hysterectomy have their cervix removed. The chance of a woman with a subtotal hysterectomy developing cervical cancer depends on whether she attended for screening or not. If she attended for screening the risk is 2 per 1,000 women. If she did not attend for screening the risk is 19 per 1,000. Developing cervical cancer after hysterectomy is a very rare event.

**Q If you have had a hysterectomy and opted out of the programme, should you opt in again as a precaution? How do you do this?**

If you do not have a cervix, you do not need to attend for cervical screening. You should first confirm the type of hysterectomy you had, by contacting your GP or your hospital doctor. If you are aged 25-65 and you have a cervix, you should attend for screening.

If a person changes their mind, they can have a free cervical screening test in the future. Contact the programme on **1800 45 45 55**, email [info@cervicalcheck.ie](mailto:info@cervicalcheck.ie) or a registered GP or clinic.