

# Cervical screening: How it works now

Jo's cervical  
cancer trust



## What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening (a smear test) is a free health test available on the NHS as part of the national Cervical Screening Programme. It is not a test for cancer. It helps prevent cervical cancer by checking for a virus called high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV) and, if you have HPV, cervical cell changes.

Coronavirus means your next GP surgery visit might be a bit different, although the cervical screening test itself will be the same. You will only be invited for cervical screening if it is safe to go to your appointment. If you have any worries, or are shielding, speak with your GP surgery.

**You must not book or go to your appointment if you have symptoms of coronavirus or have had contact with someone who does. Find out about symptoms at [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus)**

## What should I expect at my appointment?

GP surgeries, and other health providers, are now using safety measures to keep you and their staff protected from coronavirus. A safety measure is an instruction, such as wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) or keeping 2 metres away from other people. Your GP surgery will tell you about any safety measures when you book your appointment.

*“I was nervous because of coronavirus, but also didn't want to risk my health by not attending my smear test. I did ask if it was better to wait and my GP replied that they are taking every precaution to keep staff and patients safe.”*

*Joanne, who recently went for cervical screening*

## Safety measures you might see

- **Your nurse or doctor wearing PPE.** This might be a mask, gloves and apron. If your GP surgery has access to other types of PPE, such as a face visor or eye protection, your nurse or doctor may also be wearing this.
- **Waiting outside the GP surgery.** You may be asked to wait in your vehicle or in a specific place outside. Your nurse or doctor will then come and get you once it is time for your appointment.
- **Screening for coronavirus.** Your GP surgery might want to know whether you or someone close to you may have coronavirus or are shielding. They may ask you questions about symptoms over the phone before your appointment or when you arrive. They may also take your temperature.

## Will I get coronavirus through cervical screening?

Coronavirus is a respiratory illness, which means it affects the lungs and airways. It is most commonly spread by droplets from the mouth or nose, when someone coughs or sneezes.

Cervical screening is not considered high risk for passing on or getting coronavirus. Your nurse or doctor should be wearing PPE to make sure the risk is as low as possible. You can help keep the risk low by following any instructions your GP surgery give you as well as general guidance:

- Wash your hands before and after your appointment. You could also bring an alcohol-based hand sanitiser to your appointment.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when you cough or sneeze, and put it in the nearest bin afterwards.
- Keep 2 metres away from other people. This doesn't include your nurse or doctor during the test, who will be wearing PPE to keep you and them safe.
- You may choose to wear a face covering. A face covering is a piece of cloth that covers your nose and mouth. It aims to protect the people around you from coronavirus, just like other people wearing a face covering or mask helps to protect you.

## Getting support

We know that cervical screening isn't always easy and, although things are different, it is important you still get the support you need. A nurse or doctor at your GP surgery can talk through anything you would find helpful and see whether it's possible at the moment.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust is also here to support you. We answer common questions about what to expect from cervical screening at [jostrust.org.uk/coronavirus-faqs](https://jostrust.org.uk/coronavirus-faqs)

Our Helpline is open if you want to talk through anything or simply have someone listen to your concerns on **0808 802 8000**. We have a welcoming community in our online Forum, as well as an Ask the Expert service where you can get a response from a medical professional.

For more ways we can support you, visit [jostrust.org.uk/support](https://jostrust.org.uk/support)

## Thanks and references

Thank you to everyone shared their experiences to help us develop this information. All of our information is reviewed by experts for clinical accuracy – thanks to those who reviewed this. For references, email [info@jostrust.org.uk](mailto:info@jostrust.org.uk)

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