

HPV Testing

Your Questions Answered

Can you tell my risk of developing cancer of the cervix in the future?

We test for DNA and mRNA of the high risk strains of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). If these are not present (on two occasions) you are unlikely to develop cancer of the cervix in the next 5 years. Also if you have minor abnormalities in your smear tests if High Risk HPV DNA/mRNA is not present in our tests you can be reassured that these changes in the smear are unlikely to be significant and you may therefore avoid the need for a colposcopic examination.

What is HPV and why should I consider the test for it?

Over 98% of cancers of the cervix are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV is only tested for on the NHS if your cervical smear is abnormal. WellCare advises: "If you don't have the HPV strain associated with cancer of the cervix you can be reassured that you are unlikely to develop the cancer."

What is the HPV Test?

The HPV Test is highly sensitive and specific for high risk (cancer causing) strains of HPV. There are many different strains of HPV, only 13 "high risk strains" are linked to cervical cancer. They are:

16, 18, 31, 33, 35, 39, 45, 51, 52, 56, 58, 59 & 68.

The WellCare HPV test can identify if the high risk strains linked to cervical cancer are present.

Why doesn't HPV show on my cervical smear test?

The HPV Test is a specific and sensitive test for the actual Human Papilloma Virus itself, independent of any "changes" in the appearance of the smear. Sometimes people are mistakenly told that they have not got HPV because they have a normal smear. Absence of HPV can only be confirmed by having the HPV test.

I have had changes in my Pap smears does this mean I have cervical cancer?

If the HPV Test is negative and you've already had changes in your Pap smear then you can be reassured that any changes that have previously been reported in a smear test are unlikely to be pre-cancerous.

If the HPV Test is positive and you have any smear abnormalities then referral for an early colposcopy examination will be recommended. This more intense follow up will allow early treatment of any changes (usually simple laser treatment) and avoid the development of cancer of the cervix.

If the HPV Test is positive and your smear tests are normal then you should have at least annual smear tests preferably by the Thin Prep method. This advice contrasts with the standard 3-5 year

interval recommended by the NHS for women with normal smears which may be too long an interval for a woman if she has a high risk strain of HPV. Without the knowledge that she is positive for high risk HPV she will have been perhaps misleadingly reassured that the 3-5 year NHS interval is adequate.

When is the HPV Test carried out?

This simple test is carried out at the same time as the Thin Prep Pap Test during a gentle examination.

How can I make an appointment for the HPV test?

Simply call WellCare on 01225 312 040 and speak to one of our Patient Service Advisors.

HPV vaccination

Your Questions Answered

Why is the vaccine given to children?

HPV is a sexually transmitted virus. Therefore it is given to children long before they become sexually active.

Can the vaccine be given to women over 26?

Gardasil has a licence for women up to 26 years of age because the clinical trials were in that age group. If a woman over 26 wishes to have Gardasil® it will be “off licence”.

What else can the vaccine protect from?

Gardasil® can also prevent vulval pre-cancers and genital warts and reduce pre-cancers caused by HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18

Types 6 and 11(not one of the 13 high risk strains) can cause genital warts – it is important to remember that warts do not cause cancer. Being diagnosed with genital warts does not mean that you will contract cervical or vulval cancer. It just so happens that Gardasil® is also able to protect you from those two HPV strains that can cause genital warts.

Does the vaccine work against prior HPV infection?

It is always possible that a woman is infected with HPV prior to vaccination. Therefore it may be worth considering having an HPV test at or around the same time as vaccination to determine HPV status. It is important to remember that most young women will throw off the infection. Gardasil® can be given to women who have an equivocal or abnormal Pap smear, a positive HPV test for the high risk strains or genital warts. Although the data from the trials does not indicate that the vaccine will have any therapeutic effect on existing abnormalities in Pap smears, HPV infection or genital warts.

Vaccination will provide protection against infection with HPV types not already acquired[3] i.e. if a woman tests positive for high risk HPV we will not necessarily know which strain is positive, for example if it was strain 16, the vaccination would protect against strain 18 (plus strains 6 and 11) and visa versa.

Are cervical smears still necessary?

Yes. 30% of remaining cancers are caused by the other strains of HPV not targeted by the vaccine[4]. Therefore it is recommended that women continue to follow a cervical screening programme – At WellCare we suggest that you should include an HPV test which will show if there are any other HPV strains present. Detecting HPV before it shows in a cervical smear will allow a more intense follow up

with early treatment of any changes in a smear to avoid developing cancer of the cervix. (HPV is not routinely offered as part of the NHS cervical screening programme)

Prices

HPV vaccination programme Timetable for vaccination Price
Vaccinations 1, 2 & 3 Month 0 Month 2 Month 6 £ 350*

*PLEASE NOTE that the price for the HPV vaccination programme at WellCare clinics in BATH, BRISTOL, CARDIFF & LONDON is £350

At WellCare clinics in PLYMOUTH, NOTTINGHAM, WARRINGTON, EASTBOURNE & HULL the price for the HPV vaccination programme is £400