



## The cervical screening start age is changing:

### What you need to know

The cervical screening start age is changing from 20 to 25 years from November 2019.

#### Why is this change happening?

There are several good reasons why women are now being encouraged to wait until 25 to start cervical screening.

Firstly, cervical cancers in under 25 year olds are rare. There is also good evidence that cervical screening from the age of 20 has little benefit. Since the National Cervical Screening Programme started in the 1990's there was no reduction in the rate of cervical cancer in 20 to 24 year olds, as a result of screening, despite significant reduction in cancer rates for older women.

Starting cervical screening from 25 years is recommended by the World Health Organisation's International Agency on Research on Cancer. Many other countries, for example Australia, UK, France, Belgium, Italy and Norway start screening at 25 years of age.

The introduction of human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation also means that young people are increasingly protected against HPV, the virus that causes cervical cancer. HPV immunisation offers greater protection from cervical cancer for 20 to 24 years olds than screening and is funded for New Zealand residents until they are 26 years of age.

#### Am I eligible for screening?

You are eligible for cervical screening if you:

- are between 25 – 69 years of age, and
- are a woman, trans or non-binary person with a cervix, and
- have ever been sexually active.

#### Already started screening and under 25 years of age?

If you have started screening and are under 25, this change will not affect you. Your health provider will continue to recall you for regular cervical screening, according to the current screening pathway.

#### Not started screening yet and under 25?

If you haven't yet been screened and are under 25, you will be invited to start screening as you approach 25. You may receive your invite up to six months before your 25th birthday and it is safe to start screening as soon as you receive your invitation. Remember, if you don't receive your invitation, you can contact a screening provider to arrange a test once you turn 25.

#### Where can I get a screening test?

You have a choice where to be screened. This could be your regular GP practice, a student health service, a local Family Planning Clinic or a community provider such as a Māori health service, a Pacific health service or a women's health centre.

#### Concerned about unusual symptoms?

Women of any age who experience symptoms such as unusual bleeding, a persistent discharge or pain, should talk to their healthcare provider directly. Don't wait until you are due for screening.



National  
Cervical  
Screening  
Programme

### What if I've had the HPV vaccine, should I still be screened?

While the HPV vaccine protects against some high-risk types of HPV, it doesn't protect against them all, so it's important to have cervical screening even if you have had the HPV vaccine. Combining HPV immunisation with regular cervical screening is the most effective way you can protect yourself against cervical cancer. HPV immunisation is free for NZ residents aged 9 to 26 inclusive. So, if you are under 27 years and have not yet been vaccinated, it's not too late to discuss this with your health provider.

### Questions?

If you have any questions about this programme change, please contact your screening provider directly, or call 0800 729 729.

Useful information on cervical screening can be found on [www.timetoscreen.nz](http://www.timetoscreen.nz).

Please share this information with friends or whanau.