



VERSION 1.0

Cervical cancer screening

Your protection against cervical cancer

AMAGER AND HVIDOVRE HOSPITAL

A disease with few or no symptoms

Cervical cancer often causes no symptoms until the disease is advanced. This is one of the reasons it is so serious. On the other hand, it can be prevented, and screening is the best way to protect yourself, whether or not you have been vaccinated against HPV.

What is HPV, and what does it have to do with cervical cancer?

In more than 99 % of cases, cell changes in the cervix are caused by an HPV infection, and the lifetime risk of HPV infection is estimated at around 80 % for women. HPV is therefore very common, and most people never become ill from it.

In some cases, however, the virus can cause cell changes that may develop into cancer over time. HPV can lie dormant in the body for several years, so a positive test does not tell you when you were infected.

How screening works in Denmark

Screening is a nationwide offer to all women aged 23-64. Its purpose is to find and treat precursors to cancer before they develop into disease. Cervical cancer screening is free for everyone residing in Denmark.

In the screening programme, we make sure you receive an invitation by digital post at fixed 5-year intervals. Each screening test result you receive includes a recommendation for what should happen next.

Which test will I get, and how often?

Which test you are offered depends on your age. The sample itself is taken either at your own doctor or at home with an HPV home test.

At your own doctor

The doctor takes a small cell sample from the cervix with a soft brush. The test is quick, but some women find it uncomfortable. If you are nervous, tell your doctor, who can take this into account.

With an HPV home test

If you receive an invitation for an HPV home test, go to www.HPV-hjemmetest.dk and sign up. You will need the self-service code (tast-selv-kode) printed on your invitation. We will then send a home test kit to you by post. Once you have taken the sample, you send it back to us. Postage is pre-paid.

For samples taken at your own doctor as well as HPV home tests, you can expect a result at www.sundhed.dk within 10 working days.

The table below shows which test you are offered, and how often you are invited.

Age	How you are screened
23-29 years	You are tested for cell changes rather than HPV, because HPV testing in this age group can lead to unnecessary investigations and treatment
30-59 years	You receive HPV-based screening. The HPV test is more sensitive, so more time can pass between tests. You are invited every five years
60-64 years	You are invited for one test. If the sample is negative, you leave the screening programme

What happens if the test shows HPV or cell changes?

It does not mean you have cancer

- The more sensitive HPV test means that more women are told they need further examination, without necessarily developing cell changes that require treatment.

If an HPV self-sample shows HPV, it is recommended that you have a new sample taken at your own doctor. If cell changes are found, you will be offered follow-up or a referral to a gynaecologist. Treatment of precursors is usually a small and gentle procedure.

An extra invitation can cause worry, so do talk to your doctor about what the result means.

If you do not respond to the invitation

Cervical cancer screening is a cancer prevention offer. If you do not respond, you will automatically receive a reminder after 3 months and a second reminder 3 months after that. You can always book an appointment with your doctor, even if you have let an invitation lapse.

Screening works

The lifetime risk of cervical cancer was around 3.5 % in the 1960s and is around 1 % today. Women who take part in screening regularly significantly reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer. Today, about half of all cases are found among women who do not take part in the screening programme.

The HPV vaccine is not enough on its own

Since 2009, it has been possible to be vaccinated against HPV. The vaccine protects against some of the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer, but not all of them. It is therefore still important to be screened, even if you are vaccinated.

Screening is not the same as having symptoms

Screening is for women without symptoms. If you have bleeding outside your period, bleeding after intercourse or after menopause, or unusual discharge or pain in the lower abdomen, contact your doctor right away and do not wait for your next invitation.

Do you not want to be invited?

Participation is voluntary. You can opt out via www.sundhed.dk and can always sign up again by contacting the screening secretariat in your region. If you have changed your legal gender to male, you will not automatically receive an invitation and must keep yourself informed.

You can read more at the Danish Health Authority (Sundhedsstyrelsen), at www.sundhed.dk, or at the Danish Cancer Society (Kræftens Bekæmpelse).