



Cervical screening

Taking care of your health



Acknowledgements

This flipchart has been adapted from the original resource *Cervical screening: A health check for your cervix* developed by Family Planning NSW in 2018, and funded by a Cancer Institute NSW grant. The purpose of the grant was to build the capacity of Bilingual Community Educators to deliver cervical screening education sessions to refugee communities in south western and western Sydney.

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For users of this flipchart

This flipchart has been produced by the Cancer Institute NSW to support those providing information on cervical cancer and cervical screening to people from different cultural backgrounds, particularly those eligible to participate in the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP).

This flipchart includes the following topics:

- Cancer and the cervix.
- Causes of cervical cancer.
- Preventing cervical cancer.
- Cervical Screening Test: who should have the test and how often; where to get it done; the procedure; and possible results.
- Self-collection.
- Where to find more information about cervical screening.
- Other cancer screening programs.

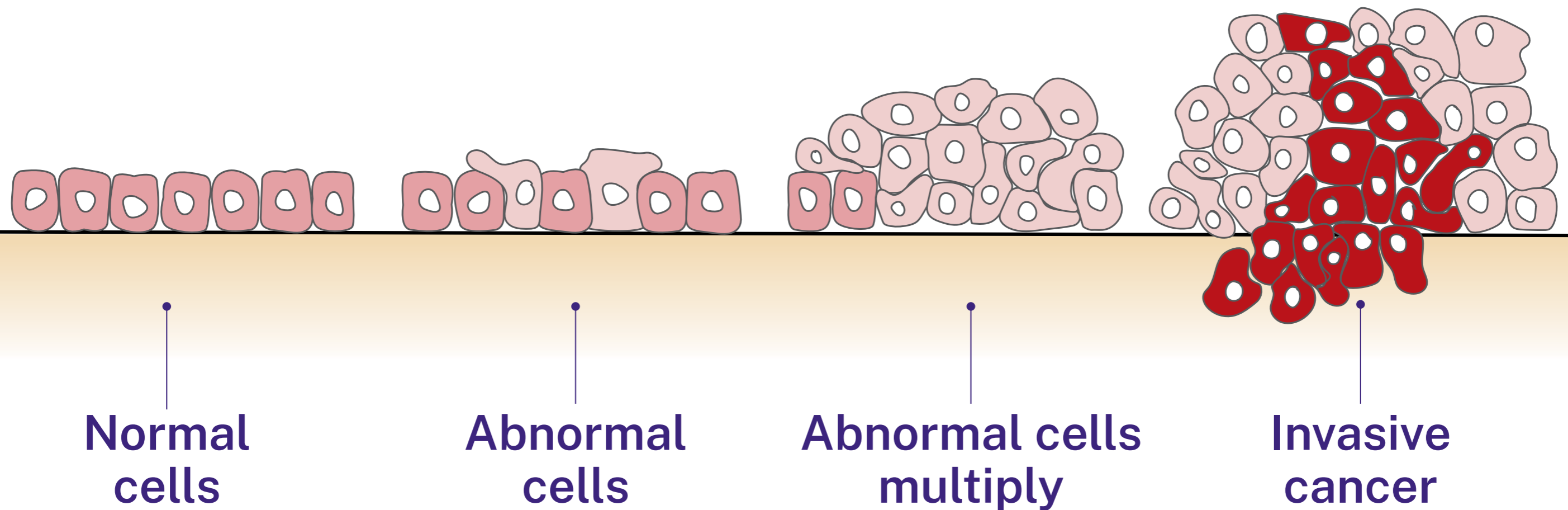
The flipchart is designed to be used by bilingual health or community workers/educators talking with community members about cervical screening. It can be used with groups or with an individual.

Users of this flipchart are encouraged to modify the wording provided to suit their particular community.

What is cancer?

- Our bodies are made up of millions of cells. Our bodies grow new cells and replace worn-out cells every day.
- During this process, some cells may grow abnormally and become unhealthy.
- A person would not know if their cells were becoming abnormal.
- The body usually fixes abnormal cells. However, if abnormal cells grow and divide without being repaired, they can eventually turn into cancer.
- Cancer is a disease of the body's cells.
- There are tests that can be done to detect cancer early. For example, mammograms for breast cancer.
- Today we are talking about the Cervical Screening Test, which checks the health of the cervix.

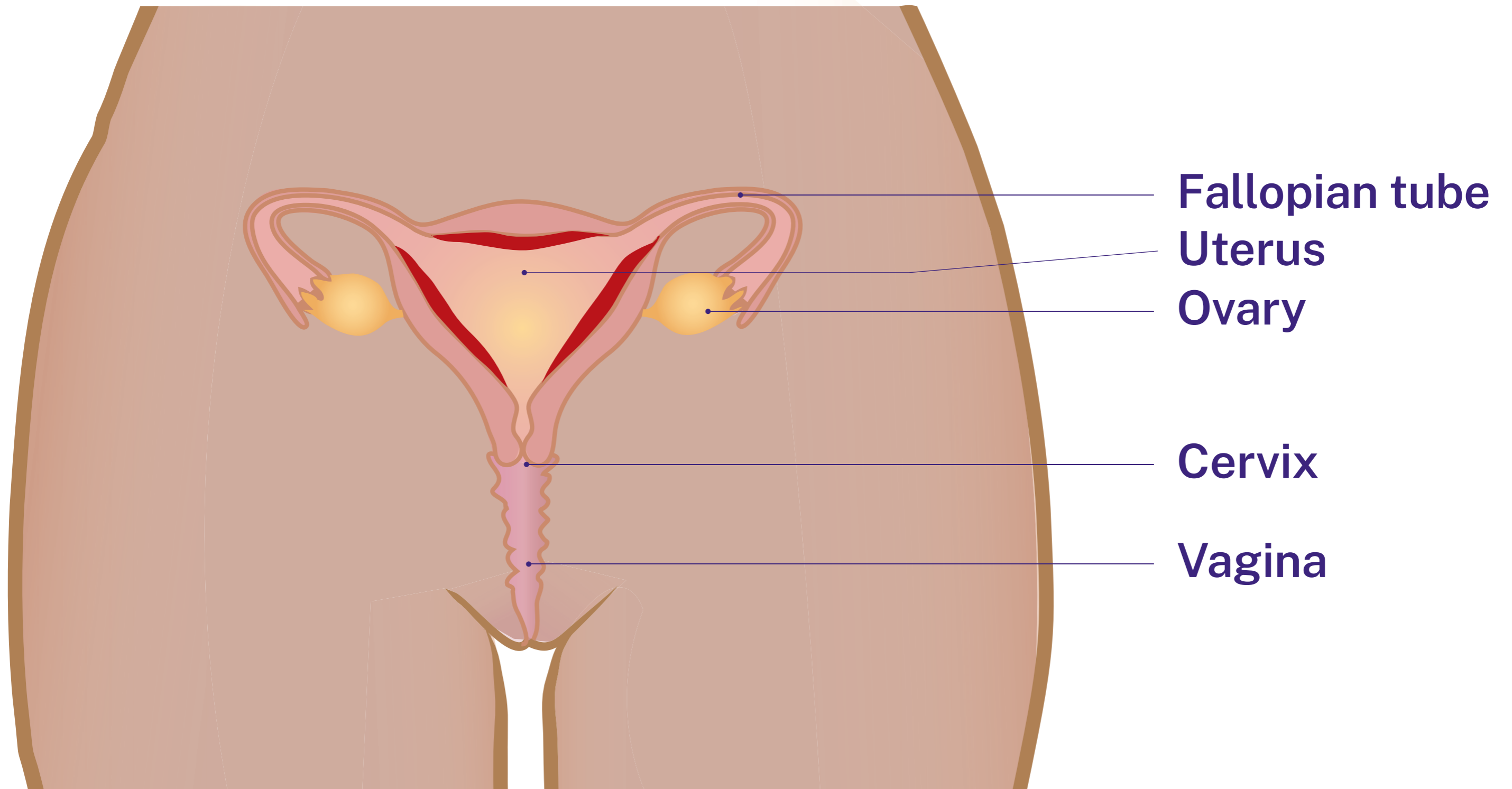
What is cancer?



Where is the cervix?

- In order to describe what cervical cancer is, we will have a look at the female reproductive system, which is the part of the body where the cervix is located.
- Women have two ovaries which are about the size of large olives/grapes. The ovaries hold a woman's ova (or eggs). The ovaries are connected to the fallopian tubes.
- Each month, an egg is released from a woman's ovary. The egg travels down the fallopian tubes towards the uterus.
- The uterus is a strong muscular organ. It is about the size of a fist. When a woman is pregnant, the baby grows in the woman's uterus.
- The vagina is made up of stretchy muscle tissue. The vagina opens to the vulva, which is outside of a woman's body between the legs.
- The cervix is located at the top of the vagina. The cervix has a small passage that connects the vagina to the uterus. During pregnancy, the cervix tightens to keep the baby in the uterus.
- Cervical cancer occurs in the cervix.

Where is the cervix?



What causes cervical cancer?

- Almost all cancers of the cervix are caused by a virus called the human papillomavirus, also known as HPV.
- There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Not all types of HPV cause cervical cancer.
- HPV is passed from one person to another through skin-to-skin contact of the genitals during sexual activity.
- HPV is common in both women and men. Anyone who has ever been sexually active could have HPV.
- HPV can be passed on from one-off partners, husbands and wives, partners in a long-term relationship, and people in same-sex relationships.
- Sexual activity includes sexual intercourse (penis in vagina sex), oral sex, anal sex, genital skin-to-skin contact (penis, vagina, labia or anus), sexual touching (including mutual masturbation), finger penetration and the use of sex toys.
- The body often clears up HPV by itself with no problems within 1–2 years.
- In rare cases where the body does not clear up HPV by itself, HPV can sometimes lead to cervical cancer.

What causes cervical cancer?



Almost all
cervical cancers
are caused by HPV

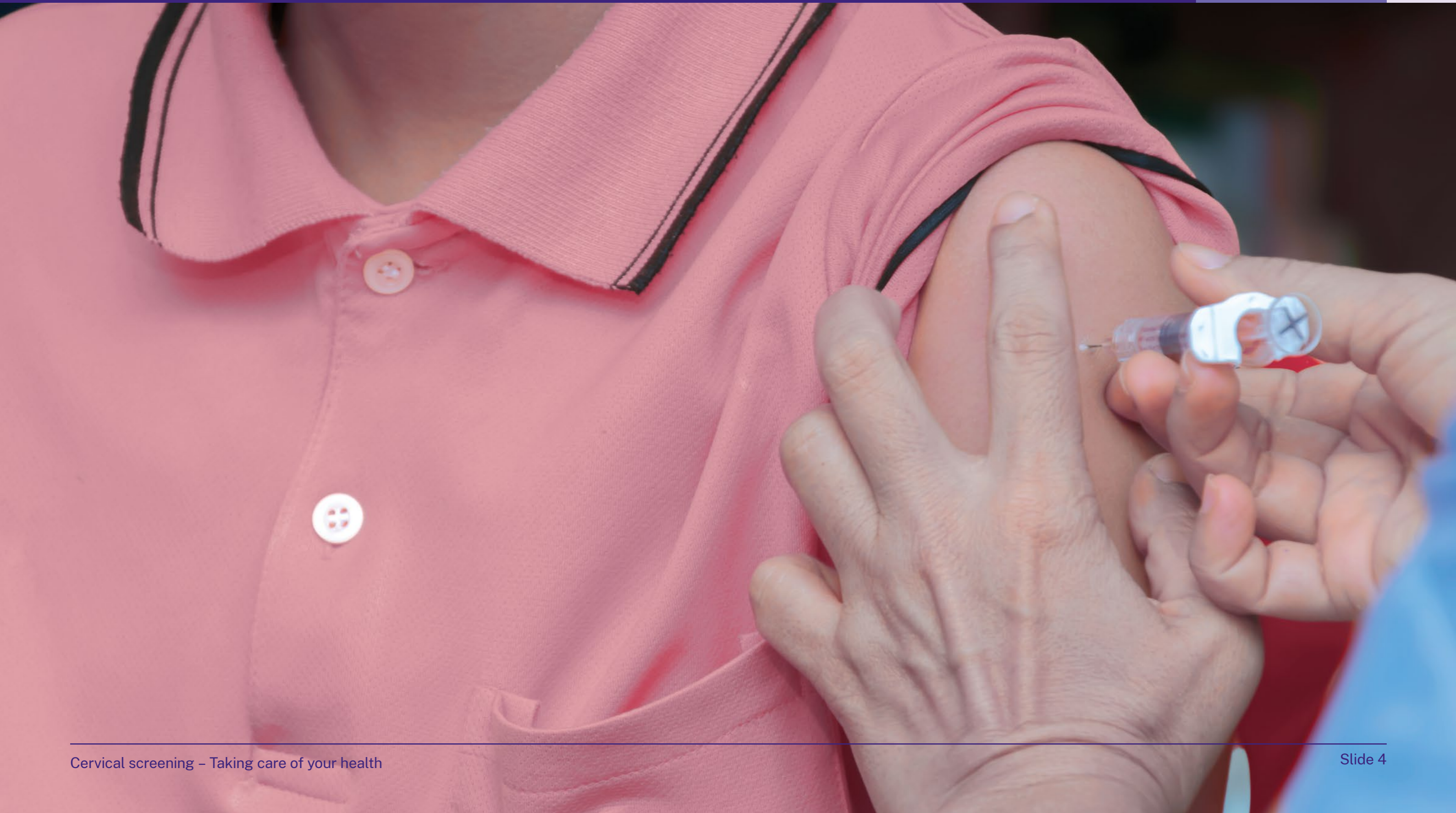
Cervical cancer can be prevented

- Cervical cancer can be prevented through receiving the HPV vaccination and participating in regular cervical screening.
- In Australia, all girls and boys get a free HPV vaccine at high school.
- The vaccine protects against seven HPV types, which cause around 90% of cervical cancers in women and people with a cervix.
- The vaccine works best if boys and girls get the vaccine before they become sexually active. Young people up to 25 years of age who didn't get the HPV vaccine at school can get the vaccine for free from their doctor or local immunisation provider.
- Vaccinating boys can prevent them from getting HPV and passing it on to a partner.
- If a woman or person with a cervix has received the HPV vaccine, they should still have regular Cervical Screening Tests. This is because the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV.

For reference

Information about the National HPV Vaccination Program can be accessed at the Cancer Council website: hpvvaccine.org.au

Cervical cancer can be prevented



Who should have the Cervical Screening Test?

- All women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 74 who have ever been sexually active, even if they have only had sex once or are no longer having sex, should have regular Cervical Screening Tests.
- A person can have their last Cervical Screening Test between the age of 70 and 74, depending on when the previous test was.
- Women and people with a cervix should have a Cervical Screening Test every five years unless told differently by a doctor or specialist.
- Women and people with a cervix who are pregnant can still have a Cervical Screening Test (sample collected by the doctor/nurse or self-collected). They can safely be screened at any time during the antenatal and postnatal periods (during and after pregnancy).
- A person can get a Cervical Screening Test at a doctor's clinic, specialist (gynaecologist), Family Planning NSW clinic, women's health centre or an Aboriginal Medical Service and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service. Women can ask for a female doctor or nurse to perform the test.
- The Cervical Screening Test is only for people who are **not** experiencing any symptoms of cervical cancer, such as unusual bleeding, unusual discharge or pelvic pain. Anyone who is experiencing these symptoms should see their doctor straight away.

Who should have the Cervical Screening Test?

Women and people with a cervix aged between 25 and 74 who have ever been sexually active should have a Cervical Screening Test

- The Cervical Screening Test is recommended **every 5 years**.
- It is **safe for women who are pregnant** to have a Cervical Screening Test at any time if they are due or overdue.

People of any age experiencing any of the following symptoms should see their doctor:

- **Unusual bleeding** after sex, unexplained bleeding between periods or any bleeding after menopause.
- Persistent **unusual vaginal discharge**.
- **Deep pain** during sex.

The Cervical Screening Test

- The Cervical Screening Test has replaced the Pap test, which some of you may have heard of. The Cervical Screening Test is more accurate. It looks for HPV in the cervix and any cell changes that could eventually lead to cervical cancer.
- The Cervical Screening Test is not a test for cancer.
- For people who have had the Pap test before, the experience of having a Cervical Screening Test looks and feels similar to having a Pap test.
- The doctor or nurse will ask the woman or person with a cervix to get undressed from the waist down (usually taking off her skirt or pants) and lie on the examination bed with their knees bent. The person will be given a sheet to cover her private parts. The person may ask the doctor to leave the room as they get undressed.
- Some people may choose to wear a long skirt or dress so that they can lift it up instead of removing their clothing.

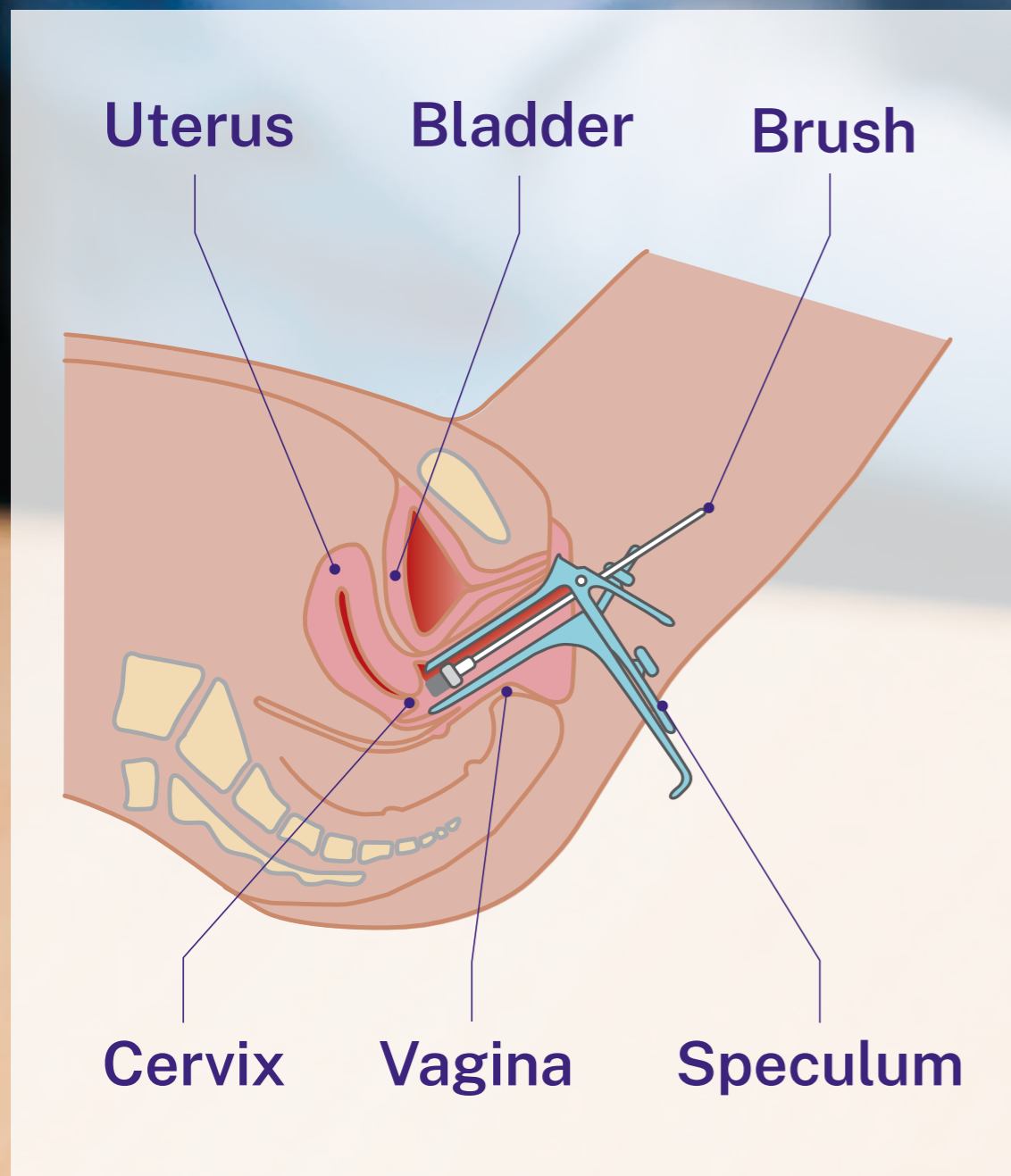
The Cervical Screening Test



Cervical Screening Test equipment

- A doctor or nurse will gently insert a plastic instrument called a speculum (which will be lubricated) into the vagina. This will open the vagina to make it easier for the doctor or nurse to perform the test.
- While the speculum is in the vagina, a soft brush is used to collect a few cells from the cervix.
- The cells are then put in a liquid, which is sent to a laboratory for testing.
- The person may feel some discomfort during the test. The test should not be painful.
- The person should let the doctor or nurse know if they are feeling any pain during the test.
- It helps if a person tries to relax when the speculum is inserted into the vagina.
- The test usually only takes a few minutes.

Cervical Screening Test equipment



Self-collection

- Some women and people with a cervix have the option to do a self-collected test in a medical or health care clinic. This involves a person inserting a swab into their vagina and collecting a few cells from the vagina.
- Women and people with a cervix can discuss with their doctor about undertaking a self-collected test. From mid-2022 women and people with a cervix aged 25-74 years will have the choice to self-collect their sample or have their doctor or nurse collect their sample for cervical screening.
- Self-collected samples are as safe, effective and as accurate as clinician-collected tests.

Self-collection



Cervical Screening Test results

- The doctor or nurse will receive the results two weeks after the test. They may call the person when their results come back or they may send the results by letter.
- If a person has a negative result they will be invited to have the test in five years. A negative result means that the test found no HPV in the cells of the cervix.
- Sometimes a test will come back with a HPV positive result. This means that HPV was found in the cells of the cervix.
- A positive result does not mean that a person has cancer. In this case, a person may:
 - be asked to repeat the Cervical Screening Test in 12 months to check that the HPV infection has cleared; or
 - be referred to a specialist (usually a gynaecologist) for a colposcopy; a procedure which involves looking at the cervix more closely to check for cell changes.

Cervical Screening Test results

Possible recommendations

What does this mean?

Return to screening again in 5 years

No HPV was found

Repeat the Cervical Screening Test in 12 months

To check that the HPV infection has cleared

Refer to a specialist

Some women and people with a cervix will be referred by their doctor to see a specialist (gynaecologist) to check for cell changes.



For more information

- For more information about the Cervical Screening Test, visit the program website at cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical
- The website has various resources on cervical screening, including brochures and posters in different languages.
- There is also a National Cancer Screening Register which sends invitations and reminder letters to people to let them know when they need to have their next Cervical Screening Test.
- People can call the Register on **1800 627 701** to check when they are due for their next Cervical Screening Test and also update their contact details.
- People can ask to be taken off the Register by completing a form on the National Cancer Screening Register website or through the National Cancer Screening Register Participant Portal which is accessed through MyGov.
- People who need help in their language can call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **13 14 50**.
- In addition to cervical screening, there are two other national cancer screening programs which we will briefly talk about now.

For reference

The National Cancer Screening Register website can be accessed at ncsr.gov.au

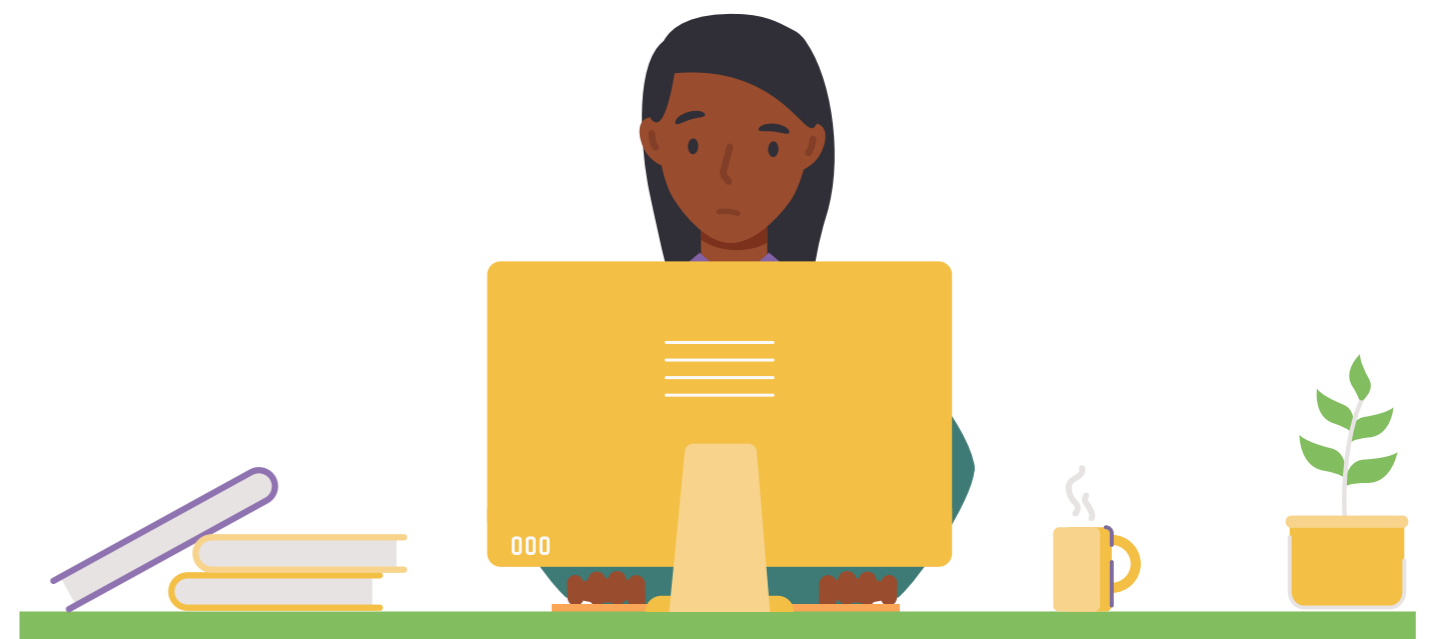
For more information

Visit the National Cervical Screening Program website to access various resources on the Cervical Screening Test, including translated materials: cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical

Call the National Cancer Screening Register on **1800 627 701** to check when you are due for your Cervical Screening Test.

For help in your language, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **13 14 50**.

Women and people with a cervix aged 25–74 should have cervical screening every 5 years



Healthy lifestyles

- One in three cancers can be prevented through healthy living behaviours.
- The Cancer Institute NSW developed a Staying well and preventing cancer flipchart to support community education with multicultural communities.
- The flipchart outlines six healthy living behaviours, including:
 - healthy eating
 - being active
 - being a healthy body weight
 - not smoking
 - protect your skin
 - participate in cancer screening.

Healthy lifestyles



1 in 3 cancers
can be
prevented

National cancer screening programs

- Cancer screening is the use of simple tests to look for early signs of cancer, or the conditions that cause cancer.
- Screening tests can find cancer or cell changes that can lead to cancer before a person can see or feel any changes to the body. When cancer is found early, it is easier to treat successfully.
- In Australia, there are three national screening programs. These are for bowel, breast and cervical cancers.
- If a person is unsure about doing a screening test, they should speak to their doctor about the decision.

National cancer screening programs

NATIONAL
CERVICAL SCREENING
PROGRAM

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

**NATIONAL
BOWELCANCER**
SCREENING PROGRAM

BreastScreen
NSW

Early detection through screening saves lives

Bowel screening

People aged 50–74 years and have a Medicare card, the Commonwealth Government will send you a free bowel screening test kit in the mail every two years.

- Bowel cancer can develop slowly, without any signs or symptoms.
 - The bowel screening test kit is free, simple and can be done in your own home.
 - The test can find changes in the bowel early.
 - If found early, 9 out of 10 bowel cancers can be successfully treated.
- Do the test when it comes in the post. It could save your life.
 - The test kit instructions and other resources are available online in more than 20 languages: cancerscreening.gov.au/translations
 - To find out more, call the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program infoline on **1800 627 701** or call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **13 14 50** (for help in your language).

Bowel screening

- A bowel screening test kit **can detect changes** in your bowel long before any signs or symptoms appear.
- If found early, **9 out of 10** bowel cancers can be successfully treated.

Men and women aged 50–74 will be sent a free bowel screening test kit every two years



Breast screening

Women aged 50–74 should have a mammogram every two years.

- Mammograms with BreastScreen NSW are free and a doctor's referral is not needed.
- A mammogram (also called a breast x-ray) is the best way to find breast cancer early before it can be seen or felt.
- Almost all people who find breast cancer in the early stages will get better and will return to living their normal lives.
- Most women diagnosed with breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease.
- All radiographers at your appointment will be female.
- Call **13 20 50** to make an appointment or book online at book.breastscreen.nsw.gov.au. There are many sites available so you can choose a date, time and location that suits you.
- Call **13 14 50** if you need someone who speaks your language to help you book the appointment.

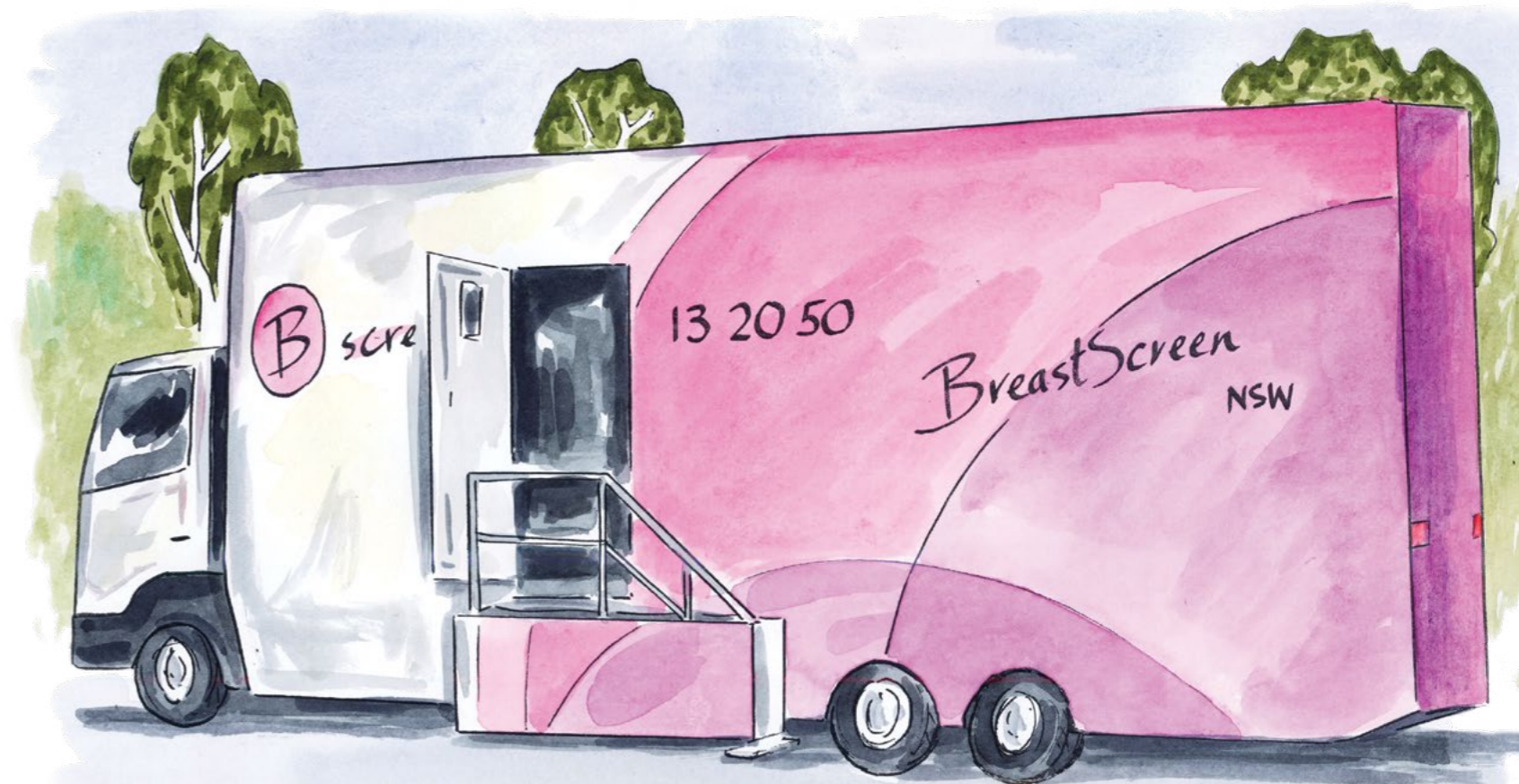
Breast screening

Mammograms with BreastScreen NSW are free and a doctor's referral is not needed.

Call **13 20 50** to make an appointment or book online at book.breastscreen.nsw.gov.au.

Call **13 14 50** to use an interpreter.

Women aged
50–74 should have
a mammogram
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