



## Facilitator manual

Cervical screening: Taking care of your health



## Acknowledgements

This manual has been adapted from the original manual titled *Cervical Screening: Changes to the National Cervical Screening Program Bilingual Community Educator Program Manual*. The original resource was developed by Family Planning NSW, 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.

The Cancer Institute NSW gratefully acknowledges the contribution and input into this resource by representatives of the multicultural health, community and education sectors who provided assistance and guidance during the updating of this resource.

Cervical screening flipchart illustrations by Julie Haysom

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For more information about the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP), please visit the NCSP website: [cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical](https://cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical)

# Contents

About this facilitator manual	4
About the cervical screening flipchart	4
Information session overview	5
Sensitivities and considerations	6
Support and feedback	7
Information session checklist	8
Information session content	9
Welcome and introduction	9
Slide 1: What is cancer?	10
Slide 2: Where is the cervix?	11
Slide 3: What causes cervical cancer?	12
Slide 4: Cervical cancer can be prevented	13
Slide 5: Who should have the Cervical Screening Test?	14
Slide 6: The Cervical Screening Test	15
Slide 7: Cervical Screening Test equipment	16
Slide 8: Self-collection	17
Slide 9: Cervical Screening Test results	18
Slide 10: For more information	19
Slide 11: Healthy lifestyles	20
Slide 12: National cancer screening programs	21
Slide 13: Bowel screening	22
Slide 14: Breast screening	23
Ending the session	24
Frequently asked questions	25
Evaluation form	27
Notes	28

# About this facilitator manual

This manual has been developed for use by multicultural health and community organisations, including the Bilingual Community Education (BCE) program. The purpose is to provide information on cervical cancer and cervical screening to women from different cultural backgrounds, particularly those aged 25–74 years who are eligible to participate in the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP).

This manual supports delivery of community education sessions using the Cancer Institute NSW flipchart, *Cervical screening: Taking care of your health*. The flipchart will be available in a range of community languages. The translated flipcharts are for presentation by a bilingual facilitator.

This manual provides some general advice and information about delivering the information covered in the flipchart, including the following:

- **Facilitator instructions** – administrative guidance for the facilitator
- **Facilitator notes** – suggested content and key messages for verbal delivery by the facilitator
- **Optional activities.**

# About the cervical screening flipchart

## Objectives

The flipchart has been designed to:

- improve knowledge about cervical cancer, cervical screening and the National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP)
- encourage participation in the NCSP
- address some common barriers to cervical screening and promote the key messages of the NCSP
- improve accessibility of information and health literacy about cervical cancer and cervical screening to people from different cultural backgrounds.

The flipchart specifically covers the following:

- **Cancer and the cervix** – overview of cancer and the female reproductive system, including the cervix.
- **Cervical screening** – information on cervical screening including the procedure, who should get it done, how often and where to get it done.

# Information session overview

**This session will take approximately 60 minutes.**

**Activity:** Introductions

**Slide 1.** What is cancer?

**Slide 2.** Where is the cervix?

**Slide 3.** What causes cervical cancer?

**Slide 4.** Cervical cancer can be prevented

**Slide 5.** Who should have the Cervical Screening Test?

**Slide 6.** Cervical Screening Test

**Slide 7.** Cervical Screening Test equipment

**Slide 8.** Self-collection

**Slide 9.** Cervical Screening Test results

**Slide 10.** For more information

**Slide 11.** Healthy lifestyles

**Slide 12.** National cancer screening programs

**Slide 13.** Bowel screening

**Slide 14.** Breast screening

# Sensitivities and considerations

When facilitating a session about cervical screening, it is important to be aware of the broad range of experiences of people in your group, and their responses to the subject matter.

Encourage people to be sensitive and supportive of one another's experiences.

Consider the following:

- Respect other people's opinions.
- There is no such thing as a silly question. Many questions are based on myths that need to be corrected.
- Participants do not have to answer questions they are uncomfortable with. Some people may feel uncomfortable about individual questions, but try to encourage them to continue to participate, where possible.
- Use positive language where possible.
- Do not make assumptions, particularly around an individual's gender or sexuality. Try to avoid using terms such as boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife and instead use partner.
- Not everyone with a cervix is a woman, and cervical cancer screening is important for everyone with a cervix, including transgender and non-binary people.
- Celebrate diversity – sexuality is an individual right, so do not accept any homophobic and discriminatory comments.

## Barriers

Some women and people with a cervix do not participate in preventative health check-ups, including cervical screening, for a variety of reasons. This may be because they:

- feel they are healthy and do not need screening
- would rather not know that something is wrong
- feel embarrassed, fearful or a sense of shame
- experience language or literacy barriers, preventing access to cancer screening services
- their gender doesn't correspond with their birth sex, and they find it difficult to access affirming services
- have other urgent priorities, particularly for new migrants. For this reason, health (and particularly preventative health measures) may not be considered a priority.

Regarding cervical screening, this may be a sensitive topic for some women and people with a cervix due to experiencing trauma in the past. Consider the following points:

- Women from refugee-like backgrounds are more likely to have experienced sexual assault.
- When delivering sessions on cervical screening, it is important to have a trauma informed approach. This means being aware that some participants may have history and past experiences of trauma. A participant who has experienced trauma may have an emotional response to the session content.

- Disclosures are not encouraged in this session. A disclosure is when someone shares their personal information or experiences.
- If a person was to disclose any personal history of trauma, the facilitator should:
  - show empathy through their tone of voice and body language
  - acknowledge the distress that the participant may be experiencing
  - provide the client with contact details for additional support.

If you have a co-facilitator, they can talk to the participant outside of the group or you can talk to them later.

## Literacy

Consider the literacy levels of the people in your group in relation to the information, instructions and handouts you plan to provide.

## Duty of care

Facilitators may need to refer women and people with a cervix to other services if issues or other priorities arise for them during the session.

## Delivery mode

The session content is delivered via either:

- a printed A3 flipchart with an inbuilt stand
- a PowerPoint presentation.

These are available to organisations upon request by emailing [CINSW-CervicalScreening@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CINSW-CervicalScreening@health.nsw.gov.au)

# Support and feedback

If you have any questions about cervical screening, these can be emailed to the NSW Cervical Screening Program at [CINSW-CervicalScreening@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:CINSW-CervicalScreening@health.nsw.gov.au)

## Evaluation

You may wish to evaluate the effectiveness of your session by recording any feedback from your participants. Feedback may include:

- reactions from the facilitators or participants about the materials
- comments about how useful the information session is in improving the participant's knowledge and confidence about cervical cancer and cervical screening
- how likely the participants are to book a cervical screening appointment after the session.

An **evaluation form** is included at the end of this manual which you may wish to photocopy and complete at your information session.

# Information session checklist

Activity		✓
<b>Facilitator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise the facilitator and any other speakers/contributors you wish to invite.</li> </ul>	
<b>Select date and time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider participant availability.</li> <li>Consider whether there is an existing community event or group that could incorporate the cervical screening session.</li> <li>Consider the time of the session – some participants may have family responsibilities to drop off and pick up children from school.</li> <li>Check if there are any religious observances to be accommodated, such as fasting dates and times.</li> </ul>	
<b>Venue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose a venue that is easily accessible by public transport. Provide women and people with a cervix with clear information about access to the venue.</li> <li>Consider availability of audiovisual equipment, internet connection, laptop and data projector if required, as well as access to a kitchen and bathrooms.</li> <li>Check if there are any religious observances to be accommodated, such as prayer rooms.</li> </ul>	
<b>Promote</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the session to the community using your existing networks and community noticeboards.</li> </ul>	
<b>Travel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide women and people with a cervix with public transport information for their area.</li> <li>You may need to consider booking a bus to get women and people with a cervix to the venue as some women and people with a cervix do not drive and may be unsure about using public transport.</li> <li>You can contact community transport or find out whether local agencies, such as community health or local councils, can help.</li> <li>Identify and promote the nearest car parking.</li> </ul>	
<b>Catering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise catering if required (check for any dietary requirements).</li> </ul>	
<b>Resources</b> (this list is not exhaustive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cervical screening flipchart and/or PowerPoint version.</li> <li>Internet access if available.</li> <li>National Cervical Screening Program resources, including brochures translated into different languages.</li> <li>Sign-in sheet.</li> <li>Whiteboard, whiteboard markers and an eraser.</li> <li>Butcher's paper and Blu Tack (if a whiteboard is not available).</li> <li>Name tags and pens.</li> </ul>	
<b>Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Photocopy and complete the evaluation form at the end of the resource.</li> </ul>	

# Information session content

## Welcome and introduction (10 minutes)



Cancer Institute NSW English

Cervical screening  
Taking care of your health

NSW GOVERNMENT

### Facilitator instructions

- Welcome the group to the cervical screening information session.
- Introduce yourself and any other speakers or contributors at the information session.
- Explain any housekeeping information (e.g. evacuation procedures, location of bathrooms, break times and finish time).
- Make sure everyone has signed in if required and received any handouts.
- Explain that if there are questions that you can't answer, you will refer them to a service or person who can help. Questions can be emailed to **CINSW-CervicalScreening@health.nsw.gov.au**
- Explain that if anyone is uncomfortable with the information presented, they are welcome to excuse themselves.
- Establish some group rules, such as maintaining confidentiality/privacy, respecting other's opinions and not interrupting others while they are talking.

### Facilitator notes

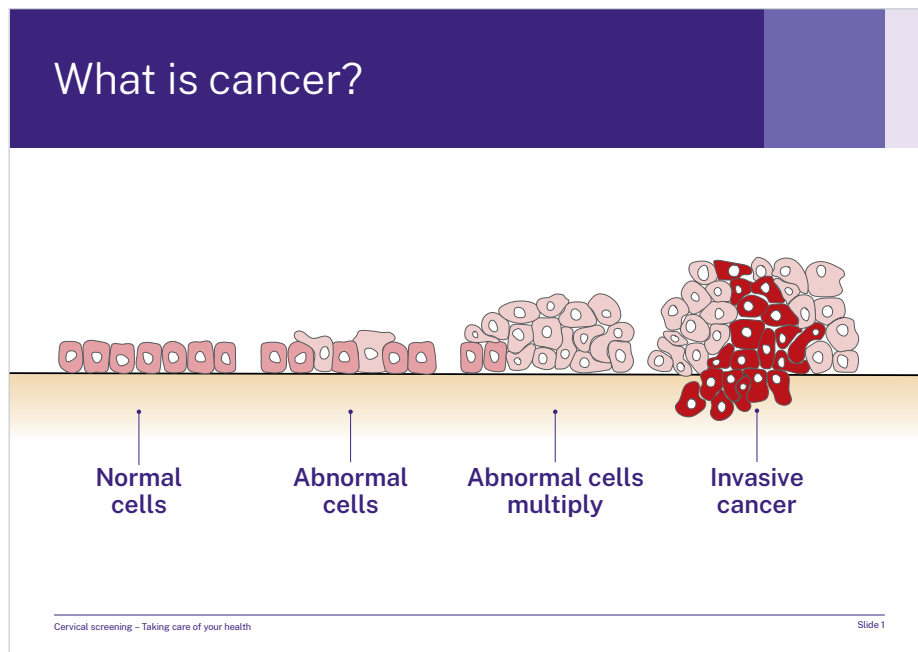
#### Activity: Introductions (5 minutes)

Ask participants to go around the room, say their name and one thing they like to do to take care of themselves or relax.

### Purpose of this information session

- This information session aims to increase knowledge and awareness about cervical cancer and the important role of regular cervical screening in maintaining a healthy cervix.
- One of the ways women and people with a cervix can take care of their body is to have a Cervical Screening Test. Some of you may know this as the Pap test and some of you may not have heard about this test before. Before we talk about the Cervical Screening Test we will talk about what cancer is and what the cervix is.

# Slide 1: What is cancer?

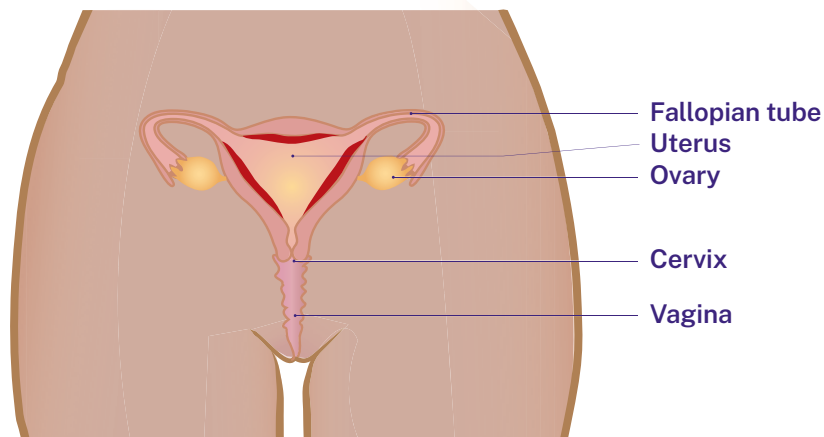


## Facilitator notes

- Our bodies are made up of millions of cells. Our bodies grow new cells and replace worn-out cells every day.
- Sometimes 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.

# Slide 2: Where is the cervix?

## Where is the cervix?



Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 2

## Facilitator notes

- 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.

# Slide 3: What causes cervical cancer?

## What causes cervical cancer?



Almost all  
cervical cancers  
are caused by HPV

Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 3

## Facilitator notes

- 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 women and people with a cervix 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 one to two years.
- In rare cases where the body does not clear up HPV by itself, HPV can sometimes lead to cervical cancer.

# Slide 4: Cervical cancer can be prevented

## Cervical cancer can be prevented



Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 4

### Facilitator notes

- 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 and people 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: [hpvaccine.org.au](http://hpvaccine.org.au)

# Slide 5: Who should have the Cervical Screening Test?

## 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.

## Facilitator notes

- 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 last Cervical Screening Test can be between the age of 70- and 74, depending on when a person's 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 woman and people with a cervix can get a Cervical Screening Test at a doctor's clinic, specialist (gynaecologist), Family Planning NSW clinic or a women's health centre. Women and people with a cervix 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.

# Slide 6: The Cervical Screening Test

## The Cervical Screening Test

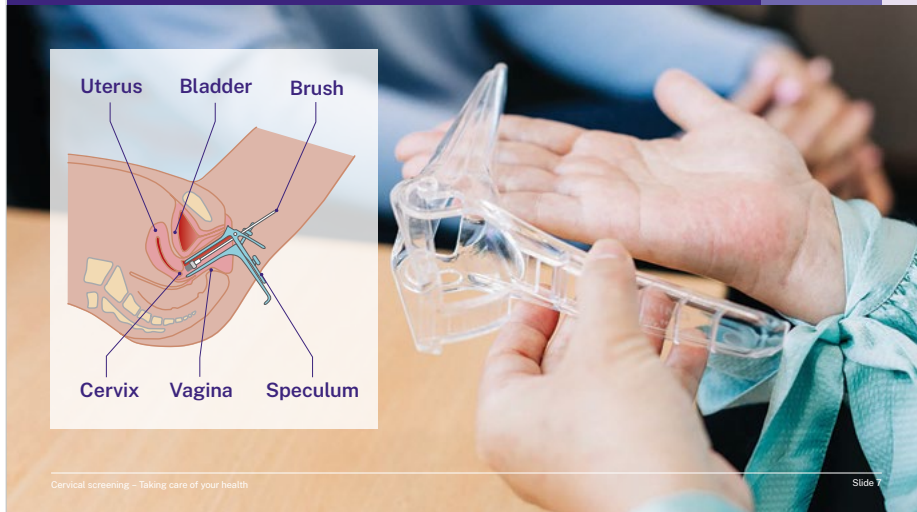


### Facilitator notes

- The Cervical Screening Test has replaced the Pap test, which some of you may have heard of. The Cervical Screening Test is more accurate as 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 women and people with a cervix 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 and people with a cervix to get undressed from the waist down (usually taking off their skirt or pants) and lie on the examination bed with their knees bent. The person will be given a sheet to cover themselves.
- If the doctor does not leave the room you can ask them to.
- Some people may choose to wear a long skirt or dress so that they can lift it up instead of removing their clothing.

# Slide 7: Cervical Screening Test equipment

## Cervical Screening Test equipment



### Facilitator notes

- 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 into a liquid which is sent to a laboratory for testing.
- Women and people with a cervix may feel some discomfort during the test. The test should not be painful.
- A woman and people with a cervix 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.

# Slide 8: Self-collection

## Self-collection




## Facilitator notes

- 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, self-collection will be available to all women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 74 years.
- Women and people with a cervix can discuss with their doctor to check if they are eligible to do the self-collected test. The self-collected test cannot be done at home.
- If HPV is found in the self-collected sample, the person will need to return to the doctor or nurse so they can collect cells from the cervix and send this away for testing.

# Slide 9: Cervical Screening Test results

## 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.



Cervical screening – Taking care of your health Slide 9

## Facilitator notes

- The doctor or nurse will receive the results about two weeks after the test. They may call the person when their results come back or they may receive 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, the person may:
    - be asked to have 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, which involves looking at the cervix more closely to check for cell changes.

# Slide 10: For more information

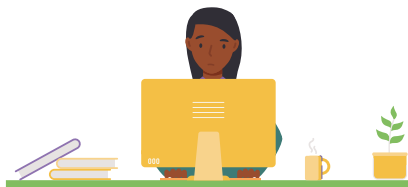
## For more information

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



Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 10

## Facilitator notes

- For more information about the Cervical Screening Test, visit the program website at [cancerscreening.gov.au/cervical](https://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.
- 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](https://ncsr.gov.au)

# Slide 11: Healthy lifestyles



## Facilitator notes

- 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.

# Slide 12: National cancer screening programs

## 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

Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 12

## Facilitator notes

- 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 people can see or feel any changes to their body. When cancer is found, it is easier to treat successfully.
- In Australia, there are three national screening programs. These are for bowel, breast and cervical cancers.
- If you are unsure about doing a screening test, talk to your doctor.

# Slide 13: Bowel screening

## 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



Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 13

## Facilitator notes

**If you're 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](http://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).

# Slide 14: Breast screening

## 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](http://book.breastscreen.nsw.gov.au).

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

Women aged 50–74 should have a mammogram every 2 years



Cervical screening – Taking care of your health

Slide 14

## Facilitator notes

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

- Mammograms with BreastScreen NSW are free for eligible women 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 who find breast cancer in the early stages will get better and will return to living to 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](http://book.breastscreen.nsw.gov.au). There are many screening locations 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.

# Ending the session

## Facilitator instructions

Before closing the session, you may choose to deliver a short gentle exercise or relaxation activity for the benefit of the women in the group. An example is provided below.

### Optional activity: Gentle exercise

We are now going to do an exercise that helps us let go of tension and increase our energy. Some people may choose to do this before or during their Cervical Screening Test if they are feeling nervous.

Explain and demonstrate the relaxation exercise first and then lead women through it. Ask women to stand up straight, bend their knees slightly, feet shoulder width apart.

- Breathe in through your nose
- Imagine you're breathing all the way down to your tummy/abdomen
- Breathe out through your mouth
- As you breathe in, think 'in – relaxation'
- As you breathe out, think 'out – tension'

Repeat this five times.

### Optional activity: Reflection

Ask everyone to take turns saying one thing they learned from the information session.

## Close (5 minutes)

- Return people to sitting.
- Encourage people to continue to practice the gentle exercise and breathing relaxation at home.
- Provide a summary of the key points covered:
  - Regular cervical screening is the best protection against cervical cancer.
  - The Cervical Screening Test has replaced the Pap test and is more accurate as it looks for a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV) and any cell changes that could lead to cervical cancer.
  - Women and people with a cervix between the ages of 25 and 74 who have ever been sexually active should have a Cervical Screening Test every five years.
  - The Cervical Screening Test can be done at a GP, specialist (gynaecologist) or a women's health centre.
  - If people are experiencing symptoms such as abnormal bleeding, discharge or pelvic pain, they should see their doctor straight away.
- Ask people if they have any questions.
- Encourage people to take any of the information handouts provided.
- Thank the people for coming to the session.

# Frequently asked questions

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**How common is cervical cancer?**

Australia has one of the lowest rates of cervical cancer in the world. Since the introduction of the National Cervical Screening Program, the number of cases of cervical cancer and deaths from cervical cancer have halved.

However, the incidence and mortality from cervical cancer has plateaued since 2002. Furthermore, cervical cancer usually has no symptoms in its early stages which is why regular cervical screening is important.

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**What is the human papillomavirus (HPV)?**

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that is spread by genital skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. It is so common that many people have it at some point in their lives and never know it as there are usually no symptoms. There is currently no treatment for HPV. The body's immune system will naturally clear most types of HPV within one to two years.

Where HPV infections are not cleared by the body, it can lead to the development of abnormal cells in the cervix. In rare cases, this can eventually lead to cervical cancer.

If a person has abnormal cells in the cervix, they can have treatment to remove the abnormal cells.

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**What is the difference between the Cervical Screening Test and the Pap test?**

The Cervical Screening Test looks and feels similar to having a Pap test. However, the Cervical Screening Test is more accurate than the Pap test as it detects the presence of human papillomavirus (HPV), which is the main cause of cervical cancer. If HPV is found, then the test also checks for any abnormal cells in the cervix so these can be treated before potentially developing into cancer.

As the Cervical Screening Test is more accurate, it is only required every five years; whereas, the Pap test was recommended every two years. The recommended age for women and people with a cervix to have cervical screening has also changed from 18–69 years to 25–74 years.

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**Is it safe to have the Cervical Screening Test from 25 years of age?**

Yes. Cervical cancer is rare in women younger than 25 years of age.

HPV and abnormal cells in the cervix are common in people under the age of 25. When young people have a HPV infection, their immune system will usually clear it up without causing harm. The vast majority of cell changes in young people also clear up naturally, without ever needing treatment.

Furthermore, most people aged between 12 and 25 years have been vaccinated for HPV.

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**What if a person is sexually active at a very young age?**

For women who are sexually active before the age of 14 and have not received the HPV vaccination, they should seek advice from their doctor about when they should have their first Cervical Screening Test.

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**Is it safe to have the test every five years?**

Yes. The Cervical Screening Test is more accurate than the Pap test as it detects the presence of HPV, which is the virus that can lead to abnormal cell changes in the cervix. By detecting a HPV infection early, it allows health care providers to monitor the infection and, if needed, treat any changes to the cells in the cervix. Cervical cancer usually takes 10–15 years to develop from a HPV infection.

Risk of developing cervical disease within five years after a HPV negative (no virus found) result is very low.

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**Some people may not want others to know that they are sexually active. Will the doctor or nurse tell anyone that a person has had a Cervical Screening Test?**

A woman's cervical screening appointment will be kept confidential. This means that the doctor or nurse will not tell anyone what was said in the appointment; that the person has had a Cervical Screening Test; or her test results.

**Will the Cervical Screening Test damage a person's hymen?**

Some women may be concerned that having a Cervical Screening Test will damage their hymen. Many people think the hymen gets 'broken', but this is incorrect.

The hymen is a thin piece of tissue that partly covers the opening of the vagina. All girls are born with hymen tissue which can vary in shape, size and thickness. Some girls have a thick hymen or a hymen that covers a lot of the vaginal opening. Other girls have a very thin hymen or a hymen that covers very little of the vaginal opening. Like other parts of the body, every hymen is different.

Hymens don't usually cover the whole opening of the vagina, but in very rare cases may cover the entire opening. A hymen usually only partly covers the opening of the vagina meaning that period blood can come out.

A hymen can get stretched to make a larger hole, or can sometimes tear. In addition to sexual intercourse, a hymen can be stretched open while riding a bike, playing sports, or putting something in the vagina (like a tampon or finger). For some girls this will stretch or tear the hymen, and for others it will not. Once the hymen is stretched open, it does not grow back. As girls grow up into women and people with a cervix, some of the hymen may wear away naturally over time.

**Who can self-collect a sample?**

From mid-2022, self-collection will be available to all women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 74 years.

**What are the possible results from a Cervical Screening Test?**

- A negative result means that the test did not find HPV. The woman and people with a cervix will have her next Cervical Screening Test in five years.
- A positive result means that HPV was found. It does not mean 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 (gynaecologist) for a colposcopy, which is a test to have a closer look at the cervix for cell changes.
- A unsatisfactory result means that the sample cannot be read properly. It does not mean that something is wrong. The woman or person with a cervix will do the Cervical Screening Test again in 6-12 weeks.

# Evaluation form: Cervical screening information session

Thank you for holding a cervical screening information session. Please let us know if the information session has been useful for your participants by photocopying this form and recording their feedback in response to the questions below.

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Date:

Venue:

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Language:

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Type of participants:  Community members  Community or health workers

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## Question 1: What is one important thing you have learnt about cervical cancer and/or cervical screening today?

**One important thing I have learnt:**

Participant 1:

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Participant 2:

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Participant 3:

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Participant 4:

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Participant 5:

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Participant 6:

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Participant 7:

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Participant 8:

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Please continue on back of page if you have more than 8 participant responses.

## Question 2: What is one new thing you would do as a result of coming to the session?

**One new thing I would do:**

Participant 1:

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Participant 2:

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Participant 3:

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Participant 4:

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Participant 5:

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Participant 6:

---

Participant 7:

---

Participant 8:

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Please continue on back of page if you have more than 8 participant responses.









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