



5

**MINUTES
THAT MATTER**

CERVICAL SCREENING
SAVES LIVES

CERVICAL SCREENING ONLY TAKES **5 MINUTES** AND IS ONE OF THE
BEST WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST CERVICAL CANCER.

NFWI 2019 Resolution

Don't fear the smear

'Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives a year, yet attendance is currently at its lowest for a decade. The NFWI urges WI members to attend routine screening, to take action to raise awareness of the importance of cervical screening and address barriers to attendance to help eradicate cervical cancer.'

Disley WI, Cheshire Federation

Why is cervical screening important?

Cervical screening checks the health of your cervix. While it's not a test for cancer, regular cervical screening (also referred to as a 'smear test') is the best way for abnormal cells to be picked up early and treated (if necessary) to prevent cancer developing. It is estimated that the test currently prevents 70% of cervical cancer deaths. However, this figure could be 83% if all eligible women attended.

What is the rate of attendance?

Cervical screening is a choice, and attendance is currently at a 21-year low.

According to statistics published by NHS Digital, 71.4% of eligible women in England had been screened within the specified time frame as of March 2018. This is a decrease from 75.7% in 2011, and the fourth year in a row that coverage has fallen. Attendance is lowest amongst women aged 25 to 29 (61.1%), yet cervical cancer is the most common cancer among women under the age of 35. Other frequent non-attenders include: women over 50; ethnic minorities; people from lower socio-economic groups; women with learning disabilities; and

lesbian and bisexual women.

In Wales, the number of women attending has also fallen slightly in recent years. As of March 2018, 76.1% of eligible women had been screened at least once within the last 5 years, a drop from 77.8% in 2015/16.

When are you invited for cervical screening?

In England and Wales, women aged 25 to 49 who are registered with a GP are invited for cervical screening every 3 years.

Women aged 50 to 64 receive invitations every 5 years.

Women aged 65 or older are only invited for cervical screening if 1 of their last 3 tests was abnormal.

However, if you have never been for cervical screening and are aged 65 or older you are entitled to a test. You can book an appointment by contacting your GP surgery.

How will the NFWI work on this issue and support WI members?

At a local level, the NFWI will:

- Provide WI members with information so that they can learn about cervical screening and challenge the myths surrounding it.
- Empower federations and WIs to take action that will help to improve local awareness of the benefits of cervical screening, and support more women to make an informed decision about whether or not to attend.

At a national level, the NFWI will:

- Explore WI members' experiences and perceptions of the cervical screening programme with the aim of improving understanding of the barriers to attendance, and informing strategies to address them.
- Work closely alongside national organisations with expert knowledge of cervical screening, and engage with public health bodies, to further the aims of the WI's mandate on this issue.
- Monitor and contribute to discussions around potential changes to the cervical screening programme, such as in relation to increasing the upper age limit.

WHO TO CONTACT FOR SUPPORT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Your GP

If you have any questions about cervical screening, consider speaking to your GP, practice nurse or contraceptive clinic.

Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust Helpline

Telephone: 0808 802 8000
Website: <https://www.jostrust.org.uk/get-support/helpline>

For information and support about any aspect of cervical cancer, including HPV, cervical screening (smear tests), results and treatment for cell changes (abnormal cells), Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust offers a wide range of online and offline services including a free Helpline.

LGBT Foundation's Helpline

Telephone: 0345 330 3030 (Monday to Friday 10am – 6pm)
Email: women@lgbt.foundation
Website: <https://lgbt.foundation/helpline>

LGBT Foundation is a national charity offering services, advice and support to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. Their trained helpline team is able to offer emotional support to LGBT people on a range of issues and topics. Their Women's Programme supports and empowers all lesbian and bisexual women to improve their health and wellbeing, increase their skills, knowledge and confidence, and reduce their feelings of isolation.

Debunking the myths about cervical screening and cervical cancer

Cervical screening is a test for cancer

Cervical screening is not a test for cervical cancer. It's designed to help prevent cancer by checking for abnormal cell changes caused by HPV (the Human Papilloma Virus), so that they can be monitored or treated early if necessary.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual women don't need cervical screening

Anyone with a cervix, regardless of their sexual orientation, is eligible for cervical screening. This is because HPV (the Human Papilloma Virus), which causes almost all cases of cervical cancer, can be passed on through any type of sexual contact.

Cervical screening is only necessary if you're currently sexually active

HPV can lie undetected in the body for many years without causing problems. However, it can cause cells to change. Attending regular cervical screening can help prevent cervical cancer by checking for abnormalities.

An abnormal cervical screening result means you have cancer

An abnormal test result means there are abnormal cell changes in your cervix, but it doesn't mean you have cancer. It's very rare to be diagnosed with cervical cancer through cervical screening. It is a test to prevent cancer, not detect it. According to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, less than 1% of people with an abnormal cervical screening result will have cervical cancer.

You don't need to attend cervical screening if you've had the HPV vaccine

Even if you've had the HPV vaccine, cervical screening is still important to help prevent cervical cancer. The HPV vaccine helps to protect against four types of HPV, two of which are the cause of more than 70% of cervical cancers in the UK. However, cervical screening can still pick up cell changes caused by other HPV types early, so you can get the right care or treatment.

Cervical screening is always really painful

Cervical screening can be uncomfortable for some people, but it shouldn't be painful. If you do feel any pain during your test, tell your doctor or nurse. Remember, there are lots of ways to make cervical screening more comfortable. The NHS recommends asking the nurse to use a smaller speculum and bringing something to listen to or read, for example. For more tips, visit Jostrust.org.uk/smeartest.

You don't need to attend cervical screening if you've had the same sexual partner for a long time

Even if you have been with the same person for a while, you're still at risk of cervical cancer as HPV can stay in your body for many years. Cervical screening is therefore still important.

**This page is also available as a leaflet.
Please contact the Public Affairs Department for copies.**

How you can take action

'The role the WI has played in supporting and influencing cervical screening has been amazing, going all the way back to 1964, when a resolution called on 'Her Majesty's Government and the Regional Hospital Boards to treat as a matter of urgency the provision of comprehensive facilities for routine smear test for cervical cancer.' Rob Music, Chief Executive of Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust

1.

Talk about it!

We can all help to challenge the myths around cervical screening by speaking to friends and family about the test and why it's important. You could help to ease someone's worries about attending, or encourage them to think about when their next appointment is. With attendance at a 21-year low, talking openly about cervical screening is a really important first step in tackling the problem.

2.

Reach out to your GP surgery.

Local GP practice campaigns are a great way to engage women in your community with cervical screening. Why not get in touch with your practice to find out if they have plans to launch an initiative and, if so, how your WI could help out? You could offer to share information leaflets with members of your WI, invite a member of the surgery's staff to speak at one of your meetings, or offer to put up the WI's campaign poster (as shown here) on their notice board or in the waiting room? Even if your practice doesn't have any plans in place, still offer your support as this could help to get the ball rolling. If you're planning your campaigning activity for next year, you could tie your initiative in with Cervical Cancer Prevention Week in January 2020?

If you're interested in finding out what cervical screening attendance is like where you live, visit the cervical screening dashboard on the NHS Digital website where you can search for your GP practice. Go to <https://thewi.org.uk/s/cervicalscreeningdashboard>

3.

Make a scented sachet.

Lots of women are anxious about attending cervical screening, which is why we're inviting members to create calming sachets filled with dried flowers such as lavender. You could take it to your own appointment, or gift it to a friend or family member who may be worried about theirs. Alternatively, you could hand them out at events to raise awareness of cervical screening, or approach your local GP surgery to explore the possibility of donating them for staff to give to women.

Turn to page 6 to have a go using our step-by-step instructions.



Visit the WI website or My WI to download this poster

4. Register your interest in taking part in NFWI research.
National health bodies have a limited understanding of why many people are not attending cervical screening. To help change this, the NFWI will be launching a survey asking members for their views and personal experiences of screening. If you would be interested in taking part, please get in touch with the Public Affairs Department using the contact details on the back of this pack.

5. Organise an awareness session on cervical screening.
A lack of understanding about the purpose of cervical screening can be the reason behind why some women don't take up their invitation. Federations and WIs can play an important role in their communities by helping to improve awareness of the benefits of screening. You might like to organise an event or consider setting aside a time at one of your meetings for members and other women in your local area to hear about cervical screening from an expert.

Why not get in touch with Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust who may be able to arrange a speaker or provide resources? Please contact info@jostrust.org.uk for more information.

Alternatively, you could approach your local GP surgery or sexual health clinic to see if a practice nurse or doctor would be willing to give a talk to your WI. It's also worth asking around in your federation or WI, as you may find someone with expertise closer to home!

6. Share your stories with us!
To raise awareness of the importance of attending cervical screening, we would love to hear why this issue is important to you. You could write a short story, a poem or send in a diary extract? It doesn't need to be a personal experience, but please be careful not to name other people unless they have given their permission for you to do so. In support of the mandate, stories that are shared with us may be used to promote cervical screening in NFWI Public Affairs resources, WI Life, and on our social media channels. You can of course remain anonymous if you wish to.



The Iron Maidens WI invited Wirral Sexual Health to hand out information on cervical screening at their craft fair

Have a go at creating a simple lavender sachet

Skill level: Beginner

You will need:

- A piece of cotton or linen print 9cm x 12cm (approx.) for the front
- A piece of linen or calico 11cm x 13cm (approx.) for the back
- A handful of eco-friendly toy stuffing
- A handful of dried lavender (or another filling such as dried roses)
- 1m (approx.) of green embroidery thread
- 1m (approx.) of lilac embroidery thread
- 1m (approx.) of white embroidery thread
- Needle
- Scissors
- Optional extras – A gift tag and 50cm of twine if your sachet will be a gift. Buttons, beads and ribbon for decoration

To make:

- 1.** Working on the front piece only - use the green thread to create two stalks with a back stitch in the centre of the cloth.
- 2.** Using the lilac thread, stitch a few lavender buds at the end of each stalk using a single chain stitch.
- 3.** Place the front piece on top of the back piece ('wrong sides' together) and, using the white thread, sew the two pieces together approximately 1cm from the outer edge with small running stitches. Make sure to leave a gap to allow you to add the stuffing.
- 4.** Mix a little lavender (or another filling of your choice) with some stuffing and place inside the sachet carefully. Don't overdo it! Your sachet should be a soft little pillow.
- 5.** Sew up the gap and tidy the edges with a little fraying.

Ideas for adding a little extra...

If you are giving your sachet to someone else or looking to donate it to your GP surgery, you might want to attach a tag using twine. You could use this to let the recipient know which WI made it and why.

Before taking them in, don't forget to speak to your GP surgery to see if it's something they might be interested in.

Attach embellishments to add some sparkle – you could try buttons, beads or some ribbon flowers.

This project was created by Tilly-Rose





Contact us

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