



## NCSP Update, May 2021

### HPV Primary Screening

On May 9 the Government announced that Budget 2021 will include an investment of \$53 million to support the introduction of human papillomavirus (HPV) screening with the option of self-testing from July 2023, including the delivery of a new population health-based ICT system. ([HPV self-testing announcement](#))

While the current cytology screening pathway is clinically safe and has been a very effective tool for reducing cervical cancer, testing for HPV has been shown to be even more effective and acceptable for women.

The new cervical screening test will detect HPV – the cause of 99% of cervical cancers – and will replace the existing cervical screening procedure for the 1.4 million eligible New Zealand women aged 25-69 years.

The new screening method will include the option of self-testing, removing a major barrier to participation. This means a woman will be able to take her own vaginal swab in private (when she visits her healthcare provider) rather than having a speculum examination done by a nurse or doctor.

The move to self-swabs also presents an opportunity for cervical screening to be delivered in conjunction with other healthcare visits and will provide more flexibility for healthcare providers to take a community delivery approach.

The Ministry of Health will also be looking at options to further improve access to cervical screening, which may include mail-outs of self-testing kits.

It is predicted that around 400 additional cases of cervical cancer will be avoided over the next 20 years with the change to the screening test, and deaths will also be reduced. There will be a greater relative reduction for Māori and Pacific women, who currently experience higher rates of cervical cancer.

This reduction will be a key enabler for reaching the World Health Organisation's elimination threshold for cervical cancer by 2040 for all populations. To reach this threshold, there must be fewer than four cases of cervical cancer per 100,000 women.

The implementation date of July 2023 allows enough time to consult on the clinical guidelines for self-testing; design, build and test the new population health-based ICT solution required to safely support the changes, and deliver the appropriate training to providers and healthcare professionals to ensure high quality, clinically safe services are delivered during and after the transition.

A public consultation for the guidelines and clinical pathways was undertaken in 2016 for HPV primary screening. A further consultation will be undertaken on the inclusion of the self-testing component in the guidelines and referral pathways over the next few months. Further information is available on the National Screening Unit website and this will be updated regularly over the coming months as the detailed planning gets underway ([HPV Primary Screening](#))

It is important if women are due for screening, they continue with the current cervical screening test, and not wait for the programme change in 2023.

The screening programme remains safe and effective to prevent cervical cancer. Further information for participants can be found on the [Time to Screen](#) website.

We would like to thank you for all the support and expertise you have provided to achieve this positive outcome for cervical screening in New Zealand and we look forward to the opportunity of working with you over the next few years to bring about this important change.