

A practical guide to the

CervicalCheck call/re-call process

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Despite the significant efforts of all concerned over the last 30 years in Ireland, opportunistic-based cervical cancer screening has failed in terms of making any population impact on cervical cancer mortality. CervicalCheck, the National Cervical Screening Programme, became available to in excess of 1.1 million eligible women aged 25 to 60 years on 1 September 2008.

A successful national programme in Ireland has the potential to reduce mortality rates from cervical cancer by as much as 80 per cent over time. Since its launch, CervicalCheck has proved successful with high levels of uptake among eligible women. During its first 12 months, CervicalCheck operated an open access system of screening to ensure that initial interest from women in the programme could be effectively accommodated.

Benefits of an organised screening programme

The EU recommends that cancer screening should be only offered on a population basis in organised, quality-assured screening programmes.¹ As proven internationally, the basis for a successful population-based screening programme is an active call/re-call system of invitation.

On 1 September 2009, CervicalCheck moved from open access entry for women to an organised call/re-call method of invitation to maximise uptake amongst all eligible women

in Ireland. A key point is that all eligible women on the CervicalCheck screening register will be called for a free smear test within the three yearly screening round.

In Finland and Iceland, a reduction of approximately 60 per cent in cervical cancer mortality rates has been observed since the introduction of an organised screening programme.² Peto et al, estimated that the NHS Cervical Screening Programme in England and Wales was credited with reducing cervical cancer incidence by 42 per cent since it introduced an organised call, re-recall system of invitation in 1988.³

Smertakers in primary care have been pivotal to the programme's success thus far. There are 4,367 active registered smertakers in over 1,170 screening locations in primary care, of which 1,388 are practice nurses. The current priority for CervicalCheck is to encourage and invite those women who have not yet proactively attended for screening, to increase the likelihood that the 80 per cent target uptake is met over the full three-year screening round.

Women who have already attended for a CervicalCheck smear test will be re-called according to management recommendations based on programme policy. The recent move to a call/re-call approach has implications for the management of cervical screening in practice.

Call/re-call process in practice

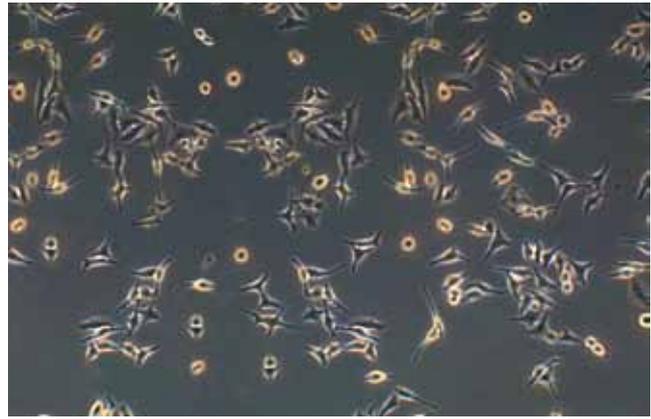
CervicalCheck provides free smear tests to women aged 25 to 40 every three years and every five years to women aged 45 to 60, following two consecutive 'no abnormality detected' results.

CervicalCheck has a national register of in excess of 1.1 million eligible women aged 25 to 60 years and over the three-year screening round every woman on this register will be invited by letter for a free smear test.

The process required to access programme smear tests is outlined below:

1. A woman phones to make an appointment for a CervicalCheck smear test. If she has received a CervicalCheck invitation or re-call letter, she is eligible for a free smear test. An appointment can be scheduled and the woman should be asked to bring her CervicalCheck invitation letter with her.
2. A woman presents at the surgery without a CervicalCheck invitation or re-call letter. If a woman has participated in CervicalCheck and requires follow-up or routine re-call but does not have a CervicalCheck letter with her, or if you are uncertain as to whether a woman is eligible, contact CervicalCheck on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 to check.

Smertakers have a professional responsibility to keep their skills and knowledge current in the area of cervical screening.



Cervical cancer cells

There are additional exemptions to invitation-only screening for women, including:

- Women who have had a CervicalCheck smear test result requiring repeat.
- Women over 60 years who have never had a smear test.
- Women of any age who require post-colposcopy surveillance.
- Women post hysterectomy in certain circumstances.
- Women aged 20 years and over on renal dialysis.
- Women aged 20 years and over with HIV infection.
- Women aged 20 years and over post organ transplant.

If the woman presents or rings the surgery and does not have an invitation letter (or is not eligible for follow-up after an abnormal result, or under the criteria listed above) she should register with CervicalCheck and wait for a letter of invitation.

Helping women register with CervicalCheck

There are three ways in which a woman can register for CervicalCheck:

1. Register online at www.cervicalcheck.ie by clicking on the 'self-register' tab and providing the details required. All fields marked with an asterisk on the registration form are obligatory, including a woman's first name, surname, surname at birth, mother's maiden name and address. The form must be validated by matching the colours seen on screen at the end of the page. The registration form also asks if the woman has had a smear test in the last three years.
2. Register by phoning CervicalCheck on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 and giving registration details over the phone.
3. The woman can fill in a self-registration form (available from Inform Display Systems – Tel. [061] 338 580) and send it to CervicalCheck by Freepost. It helps to ensure that self-registration leaflets are readily available in the surgery.

To ensure easy access to the programme for any woman aged 25 to 60 years who has not had a smear test in three years or more, CervicalCheck has established a fast-track facility for invitation. Women can avail of this by highlighting at the time of registration (online, by Freephone or Freepost) that they have not had a smear test in the last three years or more.

Following this, CervicalCheck will issue an invitation to the woman inviting her to make an appointment with a registered smertaker of her choice. Over 30,000 letters of invitation in response to opt-in requests have been issued since 1 September 2009 and the current waiting time for such an invitation is three weeks; however, this may vary slightly according to demand.



Helping women avail of free smear tests

Smertakers can help women by providing them with clear information about the smear test and ensuring they understand the process involved. Also it is important to explain the potential results of a smear test and to ensure that a woman is comfortable throughout the procedure. If a woman has a positive experience, she is more likely to attend for future routine screenings.

Practices that have operated their own cervical screening re-call systems for women can integrate these systems within the CervicalCheck national re-call process by:

- Checking if a woman is due for practice or clinic re-call.
- Checking if she is eligible for a smear test within CervicalCheck criteria.
- If yes, advising her to register with CervicalCheck or registering on her behalf.

Even if the woman is anxious, it is not good practice to repeat a smear test prior to three months as this may result in a sub-optimal sample.

CervicalCheck will facilitate a smear test on a woman who is new to the programme and who has not yet been invited at the discretion of the clinically responsible doctor in some exceptional cases if it is believed by the doctor that the woman is at risk of not responding to a CervicalCheck invitation letter. In such cases, CervicalCheck will provide the smertaker with the consumables required for taking the smear test and will process it. However, the test will not, at this time, generate payment to the smertaker.

Results and re-call

Once a woman has had her first smear test with CervicalCheck, she will require two negative results three years apart before going on to age appropriate re-call. When complete, a letter about her result will be posted to her. If the result is normal, she will automatically be re-called when her next smear is due (in three or five years, depending on her age).

If the result is abnormal, she will be advised to contact her smertaker. If a three or six month follow-up is required, she will be advised of this in the result letter sent from the programme and she will not receive a further invitation letter on this occasion.

Smear tests requiring a three month follow-up should not be taken prior to three months. Even if the woman is anxious, it is not good practice to repeat a smear test prior to three months as this may result in a sub-optimal sample as the epithelial cells may not have fully regenerated in this time.

Women required to have a six-month follow-up should not have a smear test repeated prior to five months. Women required to have yearly follow-up should not have a smear test repeated prior to 10 months.

Smear tests should be dispatched a minimum of once weekly to avoid delayed receipt at the cytology laboratory, which may cause increased turnaround time for results. Such delays may also result in expired sample vials necessitating a repeat smear test for a woman. Expired samples will not be processed and will be destroyed by the laboratory.

Keeping updated

Smertakers have a professional responsibility to keep their skills and knowledge current in the area of cervical screening and best practice in smertaking. The CervicalCheck Smertaker Training Unit facilitates training and education initiatives in cervical screening on a national basis, including NUI-accredited modules of smertaker training for health professionals. Clinical updates for registered smertakers are offered annually. Training is also available for non-medical practice staff.

Details of all of these courses are available from the Smertaker Training Unit by emailing: STU@cervicalcheck.ie <<mailto:STU@cervicalcheck.ie>> or Tel. (061) 461 234/146, and also on the CervicalCheck website (www.cervicalcheck.ie).

In addition to this information, the website is a useful resource for supporting and updating smertaker knowledge and evidence base.



References

1. IARC. European guidelines for quality assurance in cervical cancer screening, second edition. Luxembourg: European Commission; 2008. Report no. ISBN 978-92-79-07698-5
2. Sigurdsson K, Sigvaldason H. Effectiveness of cervical cancer screening in Iceland, 1964-2002: a study on trends in incidence and mortality and the effect of risk factors. *Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand* 2006; 85 (3): 343-9
3. Peto J, Gilham C, Fletcher O, Matthews FE. The cervical cancer epidemic that screening has prevented in the UK. *Lancet* 2004 Jul 17-23; 364 (9430): 249-56.

Clinical Updates for GPs and Practice Nurses

The Smertaker Training Unit of CervicalCheck – The National Cervical Screening Programme, is holding a series of free CME accredited Clinical Update Meetings for CervicalCheck registered smertakers (GPs and practice nurses) in primary care.

The Clinical Update Meetings will:

- Provide advice and assistance to GPs and practice nurses in applying the 'Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Cervical Screening' to practice
- Promote current best practice in the taking and management of quality smear tests
- Provide smertakers with an opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding of CervicalCheck

Each meeting will be followed by an in-depth question and answer session.

Clinical Update Meetings are taking place from 7.00-9.30pm as follows:

23 March	Carlton Hotel, Dublin Road, Galway City
25 March	Bracken Court Hotel, Balbriggan, Co Dublin
25 March	Lecture Hall, Mayo General Hospital, Castlebar, Co Mayo
13 April	Ramada Encore Hotel, Letterkenny, Co Donegal
14 April	Best Western Aisling Hotel, Parkgate Street, Dublin 8
14 April	Brehon Hotel, Killarney, Co Kerry
14 April	Cavan General Hospital, Cavan, Co Cavan
15 April	Stillorgan Park Hotel, Stillorgan Road, Dublin 18
20 April	Rochestown Park Hotel, Rochestown, Cork
21 April	Desmond Suite, Thomond Park, Limerick
28 April	Tullamore Court Hotel, O'Moore Street, Tullamore, Co Offaly
28 April	Ramada Viking Hotel, Cork Road, Waterford

Booking is required. To book a place or for further information, contact the Smertaker Training Unit at stu@cervicalcheck.ie or call 061-461146 / 061-461234.

