# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Change to cervical screening interval** |
| **DATE** | **5 January 2022** |
| **BY** | **Eluned Morgan MS, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

As of 1 January 2022 Cervical Screening Wales (CSW) has extended the routine screening interval for people with a cervix aged 25 to 49 from three to five years - if human papillomavirus is not found in their cervical screening test. This is as a result of the current screening being more accurate than the previous screening test. This brings the advice for this age group in line with the screening interval for those aged 50 to 64.

Public Health Wales has produced [FAQs](https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/cervical-screening-wales/changes-to-the-cervical-screening-wales-programme/) which help explain the rationale behind the change and what people in the eligible cohort can now expect which will be available on its website.

Cervical screening is not a test for cancer; it is a test for the virus that causes it. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus that most people will have at some time during their life but only certain types of HPV cause cervical cancer. Since September 2018, CSW has routinely used a more sensitive cervical screening test which looks for the 14 high-risk types of HPV that cause 99.8% of cervical cancers. This test helps to prevent more cancers than the previous primary cytology testing as it identifies people who are at risk of cervical cancer. This allows changes to be found and treated earlier.

I would like to reiterate that the change has been made because the current screening is more accurate than previous testing and, therefore, less frequent screening is required for those who do not have HPV.

Those who are identified as having HPV will be followed up closely, either by being referred for further review at a hospital colposcopy clinic or by invitation for a further test in a year’s time if there were no cell changes present in their sample.

Where HPV is detected, it can be many years before cells start to change into something sinister.

The change to the screening interval has been made in line with the independent, expert advice of the UK National Screening Committee, which made the recommendation for the interval change in February 2019 after undertaking a public consultation. This is therefore the current evidence-based recommendation at a UK level. It was implemented in Scotland in March 2020. The change is now being made in Wales as the evidence has shown it is safe to extend the screening interval due to the improved test.

Cervical screening is not appropriate for people displaying symptoms of cervical cancer as it is not a test for cancer. If anyone has possible symptoms of cervical cancer then they should speak to their GP who will consider the need to refer people for rapid investigation.

Since 2008, girls aged 12 or 13 have been offered the HPV vaccine across the UK to help protect against cervical cancer. Encouraging research has shown that the vaccine has led to about a 90% reduction in the number of people with pre-cancerous cells. The combination of immunisation and cervical screening offers the best possible protection against cervical cancer and we expect to see a significant decline in cervical cancers in the near future.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Senedd returns I would be happy to do so.