**ENCOURAGING CERVICAL SCREENING IN THE LGBQT COMMUNITY**

**Do I need to attend cervical screening if I’m queer?**

The short answer is yes you do if you have a cervix.

Cervical screening (sometimes called ‘the smear test’) is a routine check for all women the ages of 25 and 64 who have a cervix. Screening significantly reduces your risk of cervical cancer. If you’re eligible, you’ll be invited for screening every 3 to 5 years, depending on your age).

At Elswick Family Practice we strive to have an open, non-judgemental policy with all our patients, regardless of gender orientation. We actively encourage patients to make appointments to discuss the need for 'smear tests' before actually booking the screening appointment, this simple test could save a life and we would be more than happy to explain how it is performed and the reason for it beforehand.

Why is cervical screening important?

Cervical screening checks the health of the cells in your cervix. The test helps to spot changes to these cells so that any problems can be treated quickly before they develop into cervical cancer. Changes are caused by a very common virus called HPV (Human Papilloma Virus). Routine screening prevents up to 75% of cervical cancers developing.

**Isn't HPV only passed on from men during penetrative sex?**

The answer to this question is no.

HPV is a really common virus that 80% of us will get at one point in our lives. It can be passed on between women, even if neither of them has ever had sexual contact with a man. This is because HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area, which can include sexual touching, sharing sex toys, oral sex and penetrative sex.

Sometimes people are told not to have a smear test due to the common misconception that LGB women can’t get HPV. If you have a cervix and have been told you can’t have one because of your sexual orientation, you should speak to your GP or Nurse about your experience and to book a smear test. ([www.jostrust.org.uk](http://www.jostrust.org.uk))

**Do I still need to have a smear if I have transitioned from female to male or am still in the process of transitioning?**

Trans men and non-binary people who have a cervix should also attend screening. If you’ve had a hysterectomy, you may still have a cervix. Not all hysterectomies remove the cervix, so check with your surgeon if you’re not sure. If you are registered as male with your GP, you may not be sent a screening invite through the national screening programme. Make an appointment with one of our GP's or nurses for further information.

**Why are cervical screening rates lower among LGBTQ+ people?**

Research by the LGBT Foundation showed that 17.8% of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) women of eligible screening age (25 to 64) have never been for cervical screening. The research found that LGB women face a range of barriers to taking up their appointment. For example, fear of the procedure, or inappropriate questioning by health professionals about sexuality or sexual activity. At Elswick Family Practice, all our nurses are trained to be expert in performing the test itself. We recognise attending for a smear can cause anxiety and fear of the test itself but also of feeling you may be judged about your sexual orientation. Our nurses will be supportive of your physical and emotional needs, we are always non- judgemental and will always explain the procedure to you in full, they will allow you to examine and hold the equipment used, endeavouring to make the experience as painless and as free from anxiety as possible.

**Further Information About Cervical Screening**

<https://www.jostrust.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blog/blog/lgb>

<http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/smear_leaflet.pdf>

**LGBQT Support Newcastle**

<https://www.consortium.lgbt/member-directory/north-east-lgbt-federation/>

<https://www.northern-pride.com/lgbtplaces/>

<https://www.meetup.com/cities/gb/41/newcastle_upon_tyne/lgbtq/>