

# Recovery of Pre-Covid Cervical Screening Services



## What is the current status of cervical screening in London?

The response to the Covid-19 crisis saw healthcare resources appropriately prioritised to meet the acute care needs of the pandemic. The lockdown and strict requirements to social distance also meant that GP surgeries moved to predominantly online consultations and patients stayed home only interacting with health services for urgent care.

For cervical screening these necessary measures meant that, for the most part, the facility to take samples was severely impacted and asymptomatic women, anxious about Covid-19, were not willing to attend for screening tests. It was also important to safeguard the health of primary care and CSL staff.

NHSE/I communicated with you in early April to ask that routine screening sample collection be suspended during the peak of the crisis. CSL continued to maintain a minimal service during this time to support colposcopy centres and ensure any high risk women could be screened. Current sample volumes are <10% of expected numbers.

## What will be the first steps in restoring cervical screening services?

As we now appear to have passed the peak of the virus and moves to reduce lockdown measures are cautiously implemented it is time to begin the process to refocus women on their preventive health routines.

On May 20th 2020, NHSE issued further guidance in the letter shown which advises that women identified as high risk should now be offered the opportunity to have cervical screening. If there is additional capacity consideration may also be given to offering appointments to women who have received an invitation or reminder letter but have not yet attended for screening due to the Covid crisis.

## What will be the next steps?

Planning is under way for the Cervical Screening Administration Service (CSAS) to resume the collation and printing of standard call and recall letters. This process will start with the first routine invitation letters going out in June.

This should see a gradual and sustained growth in screening appointments and HPV sample numbers during this period.

STP Medical and Nursing leads  
Lead GPs  
Practice Managers  
CASH services  
Trust Gynaecology leads  
Trust Cervical Screening Programme Leads  
CCG Chief Officers  
London LMC

Dear Colleagues

**Recovery of the NHS Cervical Screening Programme in London**

Following the launch of The NHS is Open for Business campaign last week, we are revising the advice of 31 March 2020, for taking cervical samples.

Women identified as high risk should now be offered the opportunity to have a cervical screening.

At this stage, priority should be given to:

- patients who are HIV positive;
- patients with a previous cytological abnormality who:
  - have not attended for assessment at colposcopy;
  - have been assessed and treated at colposcopy and are due for a Test of Cure sample to be taken
- patients with a mental health issue which is exacerbated by the lack of access to cervical screening
- Any patient whose recall interval is shorter than the routine for her age group.

If practices have the capacity to offer additional screens beyond these groups, consideration may be given to screening women who have already received an invitation or reminder letter.

Please note you will need to email or call the CSL laboratory collections service on [couriers@tdlpathology.com](mailto:couriers@tdlpathology.com) or 020 7307 7373 to arrange sample collection and transport.

Infection control should follow the guidelines set out according to setting  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/infection-control/>  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/community-social-care-ambulance/infection-control/>  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/secondary-care/infection-control/>

Yours sincerely

Director – Primary Care and Public Health Commissioning

NHS England and NHS Improvement

## When will CSL courier services be resumed?

Initially it will be necessary to call CSL for a pick up. This can be done by phoning 020 7307 7373 or emailing on [couriers@tdlpathology.com](mailto:couriers@tdlpathology.com).

Activity levels will be monitored and regular courier runs restored as sample numbers grow.

For courier pick-ups it is important to ensure your CSL location barcode card is accessible.

If you need a replacement location barcode card please email or call couriers using the contacts listed above.

Purple CSL sample transport bags should have a barcode label attached at the surgery. Rolls of barcode labels can be ordered on line at [https://pathologyforms.formstack.com/forms/hpv\\_surgery\\_supplies](https://pathologyforms.formstack.com/forms/hpv_surgery_supplies). For enquiries about barcode labels, transport bags or other sample taker supplies please email [hpv.supplies@hslpathology.com](mailto:hpv.supplies@hslpathology.com) or phone 020 7307 9440.



## What about capacity to do the testing at CSL?

CSL will continue to provide all the services necessary to meet the pathology-based cervical screening needs of the women of London.

Our new state of the art laboratory has been assessed to ensure staff safety in line with the current government guidelines on social distancing and enhanced hygiene protocols.

## Some important reminders about labelling and connection to CSL

As we encourage a return to routine health services, it is more important than ever that we do everything to avoid unnecessary repeat sample taking.

To reduce this risk be sure to **check eligibility** before women are seen, and please make sure all samples submitted are appropriately labelled with patient first name, surname, DOB, NHS/Hospital number and date of collection. Request forms should contain all necessary demographic, clinical and screening history details. Please check request information and labelling are complete and aligned before packaging samples for transport.

To help ensure all information provided on labels and request forms is accurate please electronically connect to CSL.

If you have not yet successfully completed your connection to CSL for electronic test ordering via tQuest and electronic result delivery, you can still do so by following the procedures set out in Sample Taker Updates 3 and 4 which, together with supporting pictorial guides, are available on our website [www.hslpathology.com/csl](http://www.hslpathology.com/csl). If you have any difficulties or queries, or require label printing functionality, please contact our helpdesk via email [helpdesk@tdlpathology.com](mailto:helpdesk@tdlpathology.com) or by phoning 020 7307 7365.

## Any queries?

If you have any specific queries about cervical screening please contact us at [UCLH.NCLCytology@nhs.net](mailto:UCLH.NCLCytology@nhs.net) or call our management team on 020 7460 4851.

## What if social distancing rules mean I can't see as many patients as I used to?

All practices are currently reassessing their workplaces to support social distancing guidelines to safeguard the health of their staff and patients. The physical changes and limitations on how many people (including staff and patients) can be on site at any one time may mean that overall capacity to provide health services, including cervical screening, is restricted.

NHSE/I will seek regular feedback from primary care to assess capacity and can adjust invitation schedules if necessary.

## What if women are afraid to attend healthcare facilities for screening tests?

There is significant and justified anxiety about any activity that potentially risks exposure to Covid-19. This may be especially apparent across Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and in obese and diabetic groups who have been identified as at higher risk of adverse outcomes if infected with Covid-19.

It is very important that women are encouraged to maintain preventative health routines such as cervical screening, however they may need some specific reassurances about the changes that have been made to minimise their risk of exposure. To this end some primary care practices have indicated they will conduct preliminary phone interviews prior to screening to complete any sections of the screening procedure that can be done remotely, thus minimising the face-to-face time in the surgery.

**STAY ALERT – CONTROL THE VIRUS – SAVE LIVES**

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