

Cervical Screening Programme professional briefing

Change in Age Range and Frequency (CARAF) 2016

What is the change?

From Monday **6 June 2016**, the age range for cervical screening will change from age 20–60 to age 25–64.

The frequency of cervical screening will continue to be every three years from age 25–49, but will change to every five years for women from age 50–64.

How will this affect how women are called for cervical screening?

Women will continue to be invited for screening by receiving a letter and leaflet automatically sent by the Scottish Cervical Call Recall System (SCCRS) at the correct time. There will be instances where a woman aged 20–24 is invited for cervical screening on or after 6 June 2016. This will be because she has previously been invited as part of the programme, prior to the

Why are the changes happening?

These changes were recommended by a review of the evidence on the effectiveness of screening across age groups, bringing Scotland into line with practice elsewhere in the UK. Data shows that screening women below the age of 25 has little or no impact on rates of invasive cervical cancer. But evidence shows that women up to the age of 64 can also benefit from cervical screening. In women aged 50 or above, screening every five years offers adequate protection.

CARAF changes. To be certain that these women are eligible, health professionals should refer to the SCCRS **before** smear testing a woman aged 20–24. Tests taken from women not eligible for screening will not be processed by the laboratory. Some women on follow-up will be invited over the age of 65. This will be where a woman's last test was non-routine.

Will there be public information and awareness raising?

The CARAF Communications Group, chaired by NHS Health Scotland has refreshed the cervical screening information for the public. The new leaflets and posters will be available to coincide with the policy changes in June 2016. By researching women's information needs the CARAF Communications Group identified strong key messages that communicated well to the intended audience:

- Stop cancer before it starts

- Cervical screening saves around 5,000 lives in the UK every year
- A smear test could save your life

There are low awareness levels among many Scottish women about cervical cancer and the associated risks. There is limited understanding of the specific purpose and benefits of cervical screening among women who do not attend cervical screening. The new materials emphasise the benefits of taking part in the screening programme.

5,000
lives are saved
 by **cervical screening**
 in the UK every year.

Could yours be the next one?

*Page 1, The Lancet, 2004 (approximate figure)

Don't ignore your invitation
 for your **smear test**.

Get the facts at nhsinform.co.uk/screening or call **0800 22 44 88**

 

stop cancer, before it starts

A smear test could save your life

Don't ignore your invitation.

 

Why is raising the profile of cervical screening important?

The research clearly shows that many women still don't understand the benefits of cervical screening or the risk of cervical cancer. It is important that women are given appropriate information about cervical screening. The uptake rate is falling and changes in policy will be an opportunity to improve uptake and to raise awareness. Cervical screening saves approximately 5,000 lives in the UK every year. Health professionals are in a position to reassure, give further information and answer any questions.

More information

For more information see the Cervical Screening Programme *Change in Age Range and Frequency 2016 question and answers paper*. Smear takers can also see the *Changes to Age Range and Frequency CPD Training Resource*. Both resources are available here:
healthscotland.com/changeofage

To support local awareness raising there will be a national awareness raising campaign planned for June 2016. This will take place during cervical screening awareness week (13–19 June 2016). Further details will be shared in advance of this.

How this relates to the HPV vaccine?

CARAF coincides with the first phase of young women who received the HPV vaccine reaching the age of 20. So although women now won't be offered screening until 25, the vast majority will have been immunised. (Uptake is over 90%.) The current HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV so although the vaccine offers good protection, the combination of immunisation and regular screening offers the best protection.