NHS Cervical Screening Programme in England

Who is invited for cervical screening?
Within the Cervical Screening Programme in England, women aged 25 to 49 are invited for free cervical screening every three years and women aged 50 to 64 every five years.

The reasons put forward by the NHS Cervical Screening Programme for not screening women under 25 years are outlined below.

Cervical cancer is extremely rare in women under 25 years but changes in the cervix are common, which means that women may get an abnormal result when there is nothing wrong. This can lead to unnecessary investigations and treatments.

What are the risks of screening women under 25 years?
In screening there is a balance to be struck between risk and benefit. Research has found that screening women under 25 years can do more harm than good as it may:
- Identify normal, cervical cell changes and a high level of abnormalities that will resolve themselves without medical intervention
- Lead to women undergoing unnecessary investigations and treatments

What are the symptoms to look out for?
If you are under 25 years and have shown any of the symptoms described below, you should visit your GP practice, Contraceptive Service (formerly known as Family Planning Clinic) or Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinic, where an assessment can be made and, if necessary, you will be referred for further investigation.

Symptoms may include:
- Unusual bleeding from the vagina when not having a period; this includes bleeding between periods and bleeding after sex
- Vaginal discharge that smells unpleasant
- Discomfort or pelvic pain during sex

Further information
If after reading this information you are still concerned about your risk of developing cervical cancer, or your sexual health generally, you should contact your GP practice, Contraceptive Service or GUM clinic.

This information will be re-evaluated following a national screening review on cervical screening for women under 25 years.

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