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Cervical Screening Wales
Sgrinio Serfigol Cymru

What your inadequate cervical smear result means

You can get all our leaflets in large print, on audiotape and in Braille.

This leaflet explains what it means when a cervical smear is reported as inadequate.

Why is my smear result inadequate?

When a smear is reported as inadequate, it usually means that not enough cells from the cervix (neck of the womb) were in the sample for the laboratory to give an accurate result. It does not mean that any abnormal cells were seen.

There can be several reasons for this: -

- Not enough cells were collected on the sampler
- The cells collected were not able to be seen properly, because of blood or sometimes discharge
- The correct sort of cells were not sampled (this is especially important if you have had a previous 'glandular' abnormality)

Sometimes a sample may be called inadequate for 'technical' reasons. This could be because: -

- the sample leaked or was damaged
- the wrong sampler was used
- the sample was not labelled
- the sample was taken too soon after a previous sample

If you wish to know the exact reason in your case, then you can ask your GP or smear taker.

How many samples are inadequate?

About one in every 50 samples are inadequate.

When should I have my test repeated?

It is best to wait at least six weeks before having a test repeated and ideally have it repeated within three months of the inadequate test.

Why do I have to wait at least six weeks?

Each time a sample is taken, the surface layer of cells is removed from the cervix. These have to be given time to grow again before another sample is taken. There is some evidence that repeating tests too soon may miss abnormalities. If the test is repeated before six weeks, it will be reported as inadequate.

Is there anything I can do to help for next time?

If you have any discharge or irregular bleeding, it is important that you report this to your doctor. This may need investigating or treating before you have your test repeated.

It is important that samples are not taken when you are having a period, so avoid making an appointment around this time.

Sometimes your GP or smear taker may recommend that you use a cream or gel that you put inside your vagina for a couple of weeks before having your test repeated. It is important to use this as directed.

What if my next test is inadequate too?

If this is your first inadequate test and your next one is inadequate, you will be advised to have it repeated again.

If you have three inadequate tests in a row, you will be referred to a colposcopy clinic for further investigations.

Colposcopy is an examination that allows the cervix to be examined more closely to see if there are any areas that may need treatment.

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If you need to have a colposcopy, you will receive a letter and a leaflet explaining what will happen. Not everyone who has a colposcopy needs treatment.

More Information and Support

For more details about the records we keep, contact Cervical Screening Wales for a copy of our leaflet 'How we use information about you.'

If you wish to make a comment or complaint, you can contact Cervical Screening Wales for a copy of our leaflet 'Do you have any suggestions, comments or complaints about Cervical Screening Wales?'

Both these leaflets are available on our website: -

www.screeningservices.org.uk/csw

Cervical Screening Wales also produces a range of leaflets on various topics to do with cervical screening, which are available from:

- The Director, Cervical Screening Wales
18 Cathedral Road Cardiff, CF11 9LJ
- On our website

If you have any questions about the service:

- Ask your doctor

- Contact your local health clinic
- Visit our website
- Visit NHS direct at www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk or phone on 0845 4647