

Stop cancer before it starts

HPV self-sampling

What you need to know

NHS SCOTLAND

Public Health Scotland

What's HPV self-sampling?

HPV self-sampling is part of the cervical screening programme. The HPV self-sampling test checks for the human papillomavirus (HPV) in the cells of your vagina. It can find out if you're at risk of getting cervical cancer even if you feel healthy.

You'll get an instruction leaflet which explains how to take your sample.

Why am I being offered this?

HPV self-sampling is available in your GP practice as part of a pilot within your health board. This pilot will help with the national roll-out of HPV self-sampling in Scotland.

It's offered to women, and anyone with a cervix, who have never gone for cervical screening when invited, or who do not go very often.

Self-sampling is safe and is already being offered in other countries.

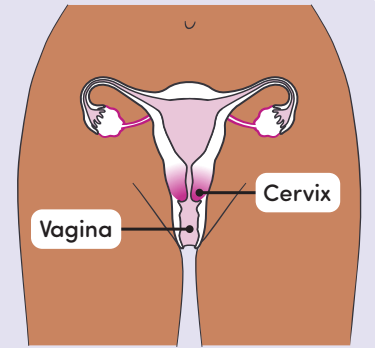
It's important to get tested for HPV even if you've had the HPV vaccine.

What's HPV?

HPV is a common virus. Most people will have HPV at some point in their life. Your body can clear most HPV infections without you ever knowing you had it.

But, for some people, HPV can become serious and can cause changes to the cells in the cervix. These changes can turn into cervical cancer if they're not treated. Cervical cancer is a serious illness. This test could help save your life.

HPV self-sampling cannot find other cancers of the reproductive system such as ovary, womb, vulval or vaginal cancers.



Testing for HPV is an effective and accurate way of finding out if you're at a higher risk of developing cervical cancer.

Is HPV self-sampling different from cervical screening?

HPV self-sampling is part of the cervical screening programme. But self-sampling allows you to take your own vaginal swab to test for HPV.

This is different from the usual cervical screening which involves a health professional collecting a sample from your cervix to check for both HPV and cell changes.

You can take your sample in a private area or in a bathroom. It's quick and easy to do, and should not be uncomfortable.

If HPV is found in your self-sampling test, you'll be invited for cervical screening with a health professional. This is so they can check for cell changes.

If you have any questions or need help, your health professional will be understanding and can support you.

It's your choice

You can choose which test you want to take.

Having a sample taken by a health professional is most effective. But self-sampling is a very good option if you do not want to have your cervical screening sample taken by a health professional.

Are there any reasons I should not do HPV self-sampling?

You should not take a sample if you:

- are pregnant, or have been pregnant in the last 6 weeks
- have used vaginal medication or gel in the last 24 hours (such as a pessary for thrush)

You can still take a sample if you're on your period, but you may prefer to wait if you have a heavy flow.

Are there any risks?

There's a very small chance the swab could break while you're taking your sample. If the swab does break, gently remove it and speak with your health professional in your GP practice.

No screening test is 100% effective. It's very unlikely, but the test can miss HPV even when it's there. There's also no guarantee you will not get HPV in the future.

Your results

Your sample will be sent to a lab for testing. You'll get your results by letter or phone. Please make sure your GP practice has your up-to-date address and phone number.

There are **three possible results** from HPV self-sampling.

1. No HPV found

Most people will get this result. If no HPV is found in your sample, you will not need any more tests at that time. You'll be invited for a cervical screening test in 5 years.

2. HPV is found

If HPV is found in your sample, you'll be invited for a cervical screening test with a health professional. This test will look for cell changes in your cervix.

3. Unavailable result

If it was not possible to get a result, you'll be invited for a cervical screening test with a health professional.

It's really important you go to all follow-up appointments if you're invited.

Cervical screening can find cell changes early, even if you feel healthy and have no symptoms. This means changes can be monitored or treated, reducing the risk of cancer developing in future.

Changes to look out for

Your GP wants to know if you notice any of these symptoms:

- Bleeding after sex, between periods or after the menopause.
- Pain during or after having sex.
- Any unusual fluids from your vagina.
- Pain in your lower back, between your hip bones (pelvis) or in your lower tummy.

Find out more

For more information about the cervical screening programme:

- speak to your GP practice, community health worker, doctor or nurse
- visit nhsinform.scot/cervicalscreening

Translations

Easy read

BSL

Audio

Large print

Braille

Translations and other formats are available on request at:

nhsinform.scot/hpvselfsampling

phs.otherformats@phs.scot

0131 314 5300

You'll get an instruction leaflet which explains how to take your sample.



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About this test

Research shows this test is an effective way of testing for HPV in people who do not regularly go for cervical screening.

Although this test was not developed for HPV self-sampling, it's safe and is already used throughout the NHS to test other types of samples.

What happens to your sample

Your sample may be stored and used for research, service improvement, education and training. If this happens, your personal details will be removed.

NHS Scotland will keep your personal screening information (including test results) private, confidential and safe.

Find out more

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Scan for video instructions



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Before taking your sample

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- have used vaginal medication or gel in the last 24 hours (such as a pessary for thrush)

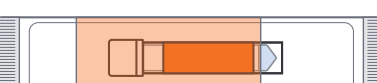
You can still take a sample if you're on your period, but you may prefer to wait if you have a heavy flow.

What's in your kit?

Swab



Sample tube



If anything is missing or damaged, let your health professional know and they'll give you a new kit.

How to take your sample

Step 1

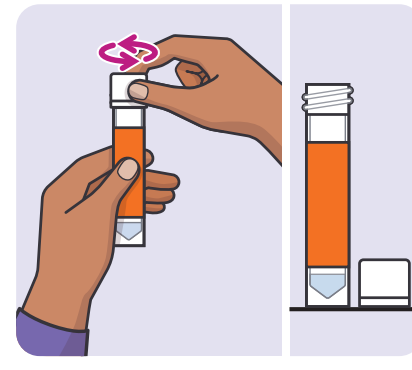
Wash your hands in warm soapy water and dry them well.



Step 2

Unscrew the sample tube without spilling the liquid.

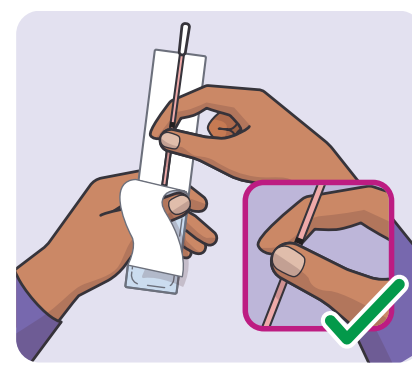
Put the tube upright on a flat surface. You'll need it later.



Step 3

Take the swab out of the packaging and hold it where the black line is.

Try not to touch the cotton tip of the swab or let it touch any surfaces.



Step 4

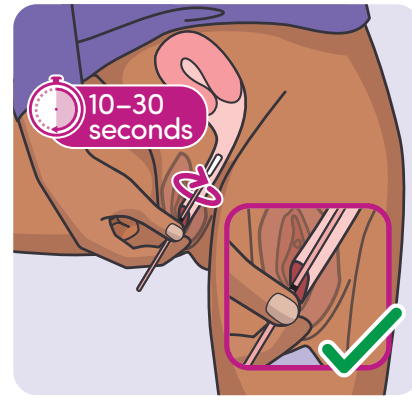
Find a comfortable and balanced position. For example, standing with one foot on a raised surface or sitting with your knees apart.

With your free hand, gently spread the skin outside your vagina.



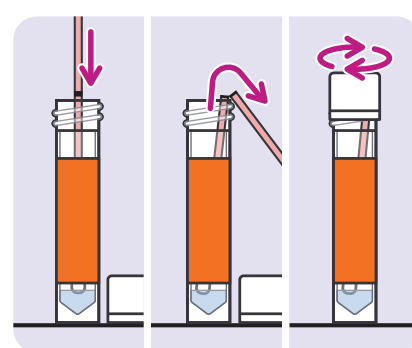
Step 5

Insert the tip of the swab into your vagina. Your fingers on the black line will stop you going in too far. Rotate the swab for 10–30 seconds, making sure it touches the walls of your vagina. Once finished, take the swab out trying not to touch it against your skin.



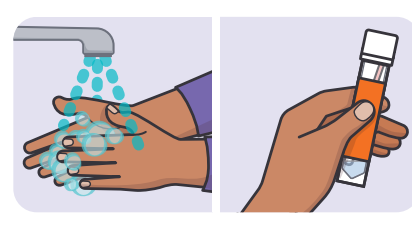
Step 6

Put the swab into the tube, cotton end down. Snap the swab against the lip of the tube at the black snap-line. Screw the lid back on tightly and put the stick end of the swab in the bin.



Step 7

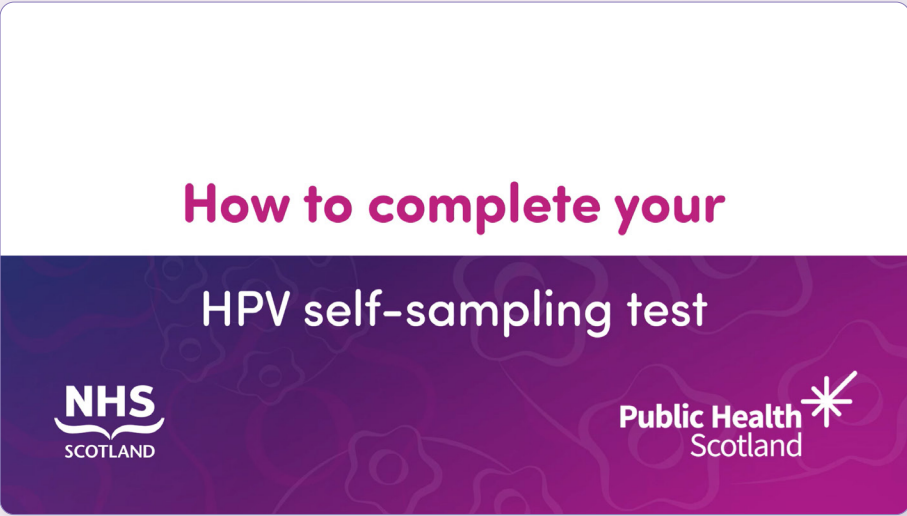
Wash and dry your hands again then give your sample tube to your health professional.



Taking your own sample is straightforward, and you're likely to get it right. But if you spill the liquid in the tube or the cotton tip of the swab touches anything other than the inside of your vagina, just ask for a new kit.

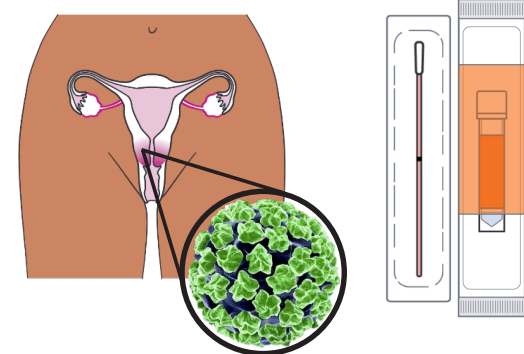
Additional and adapted illustrations created for animation and easy-read resources

- Animation: [youtube.com/watch?v=njsHSnDGcDk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njsHSnDGcDk)
- Easy-read: publichealthscotland.scot/publications/hpv-self-sampling-information-in-easy-read/



The HPV self sampling test

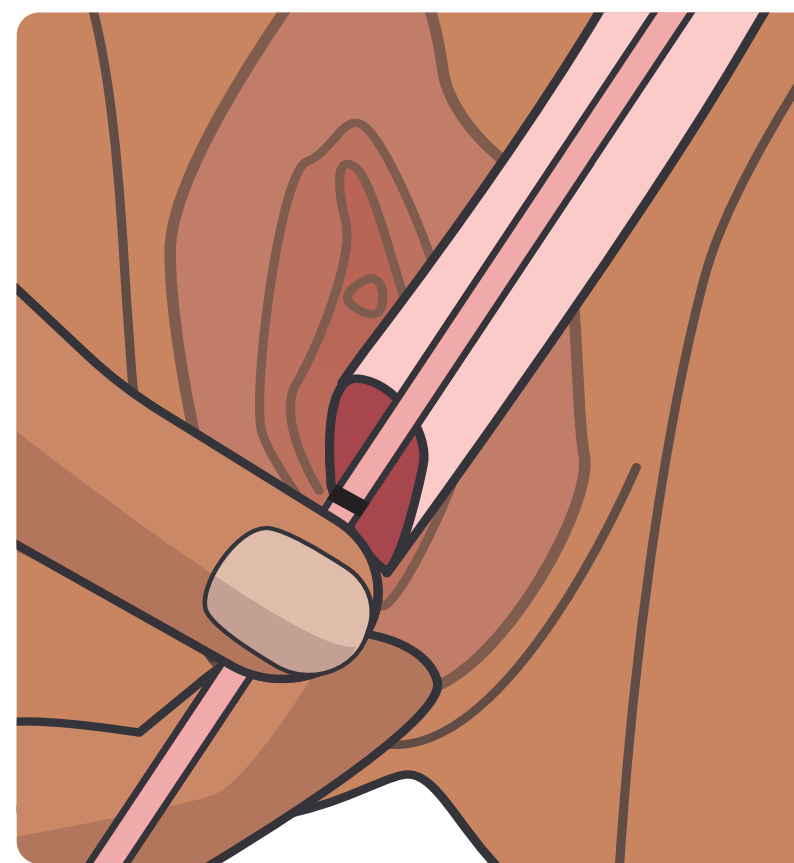
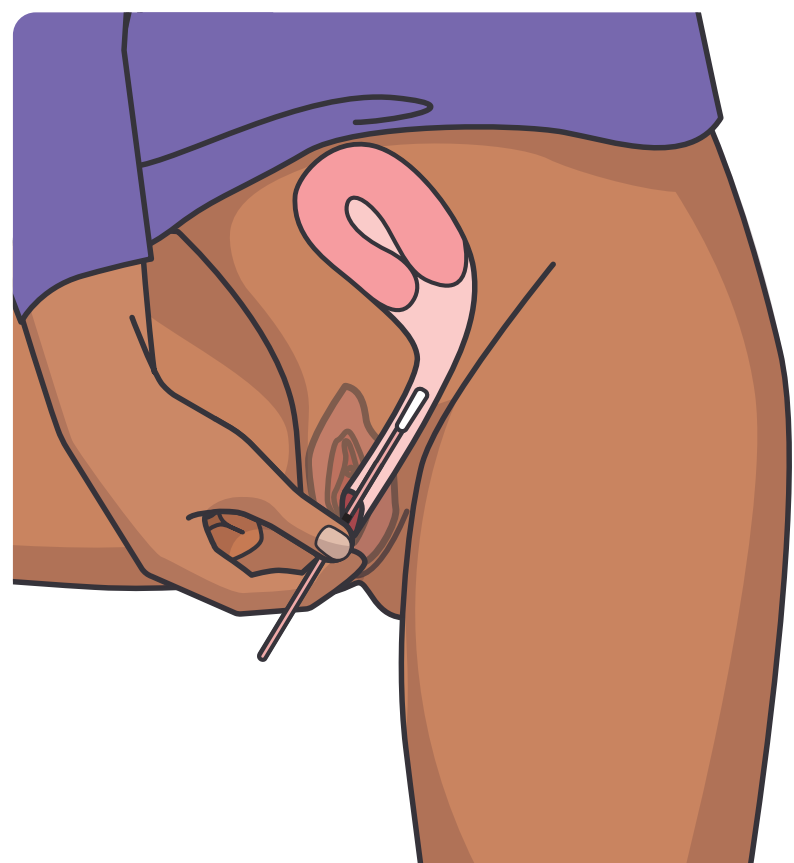
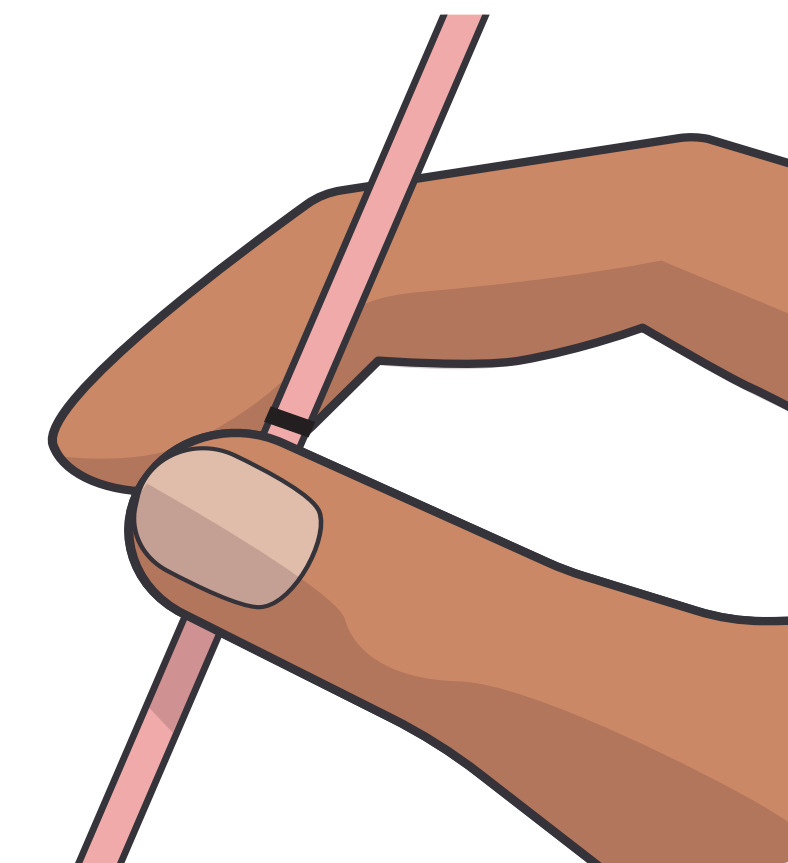
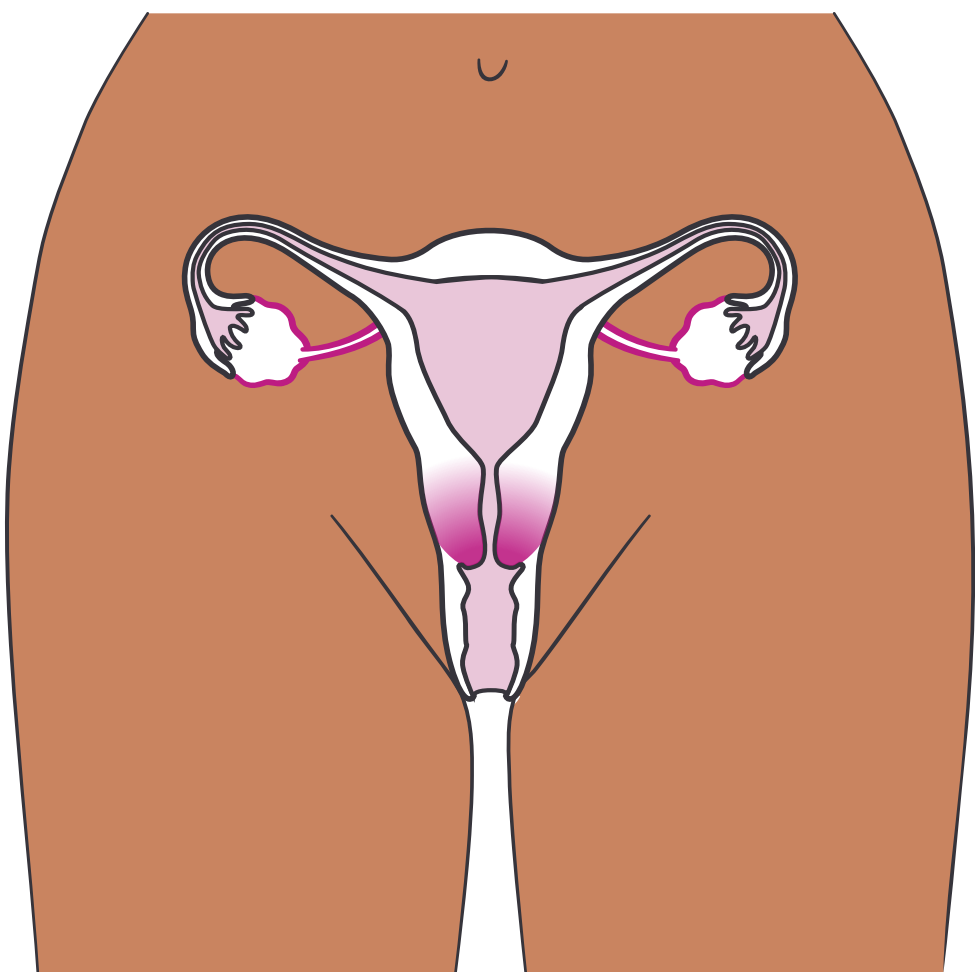
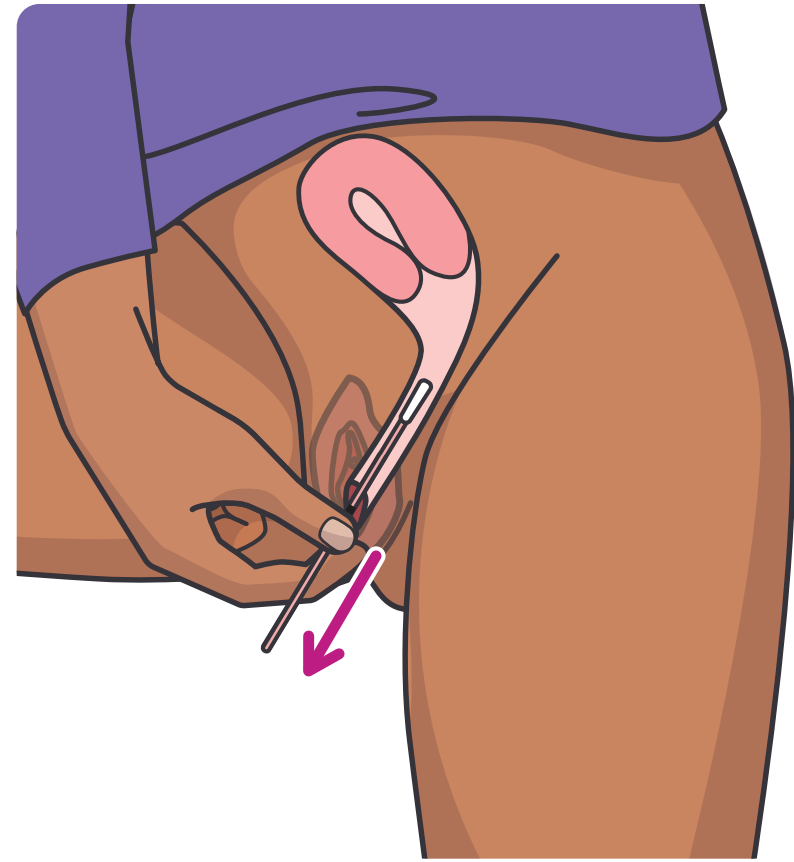
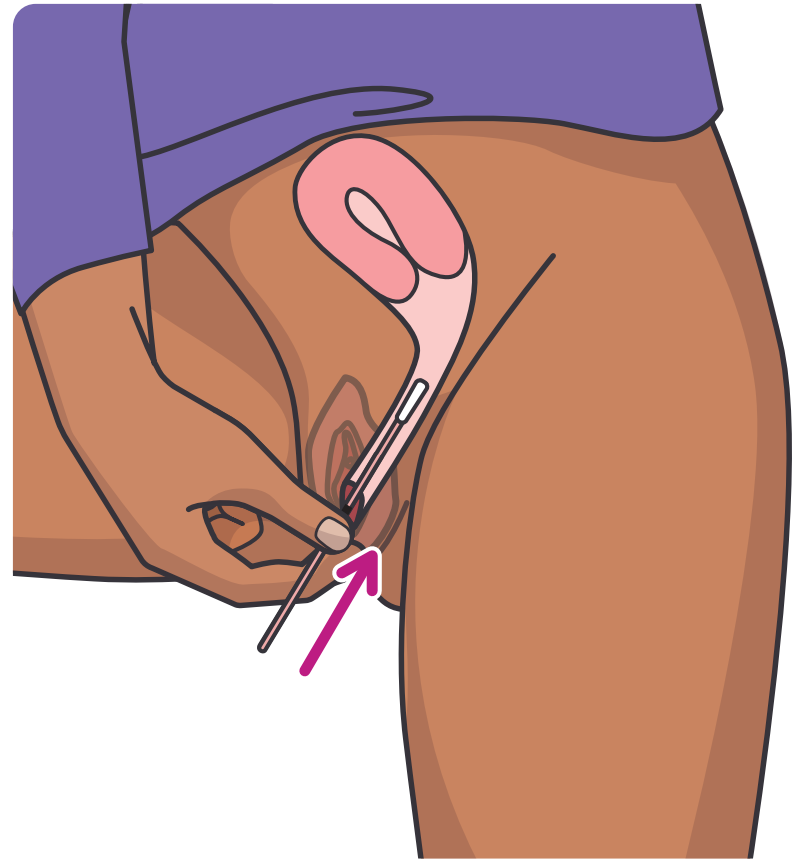
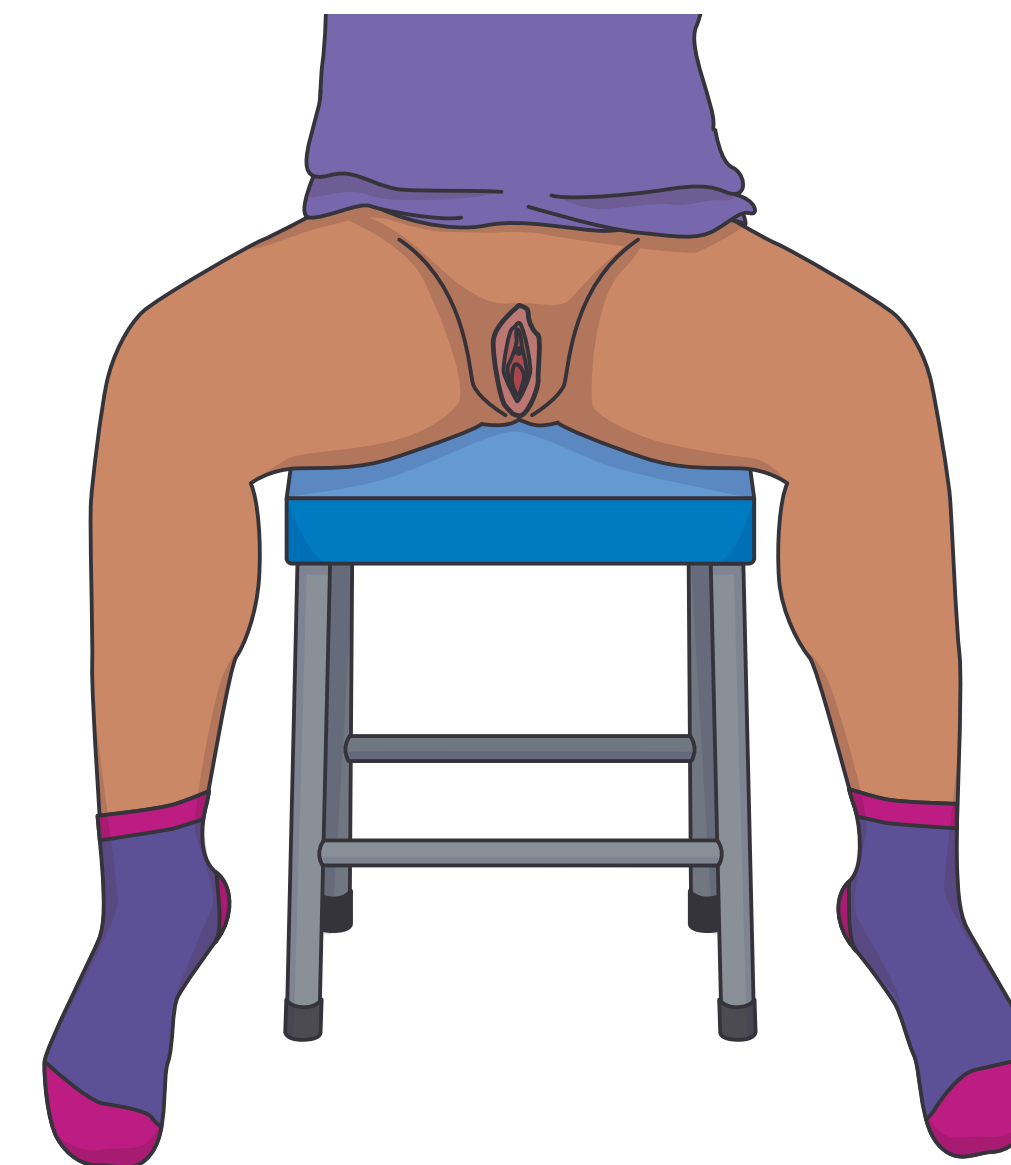
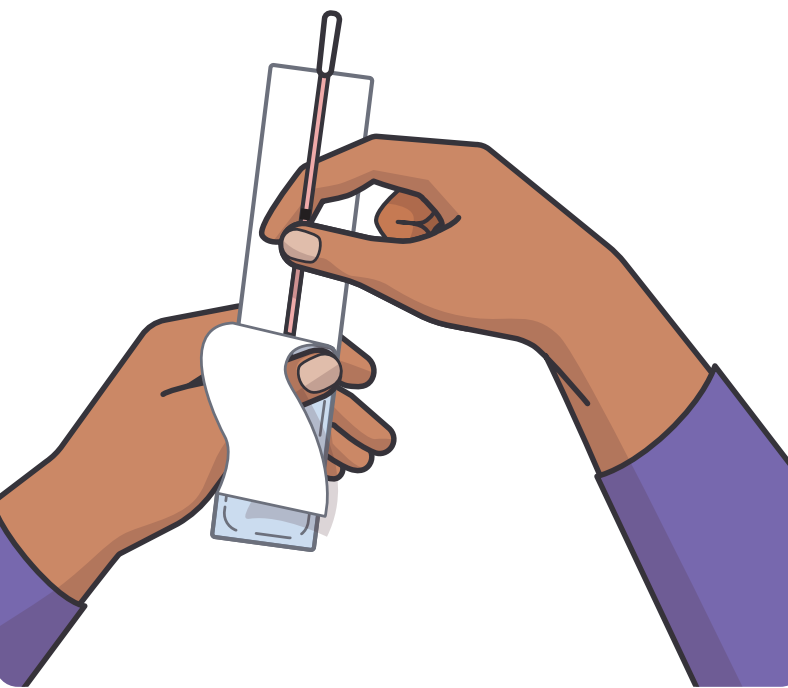
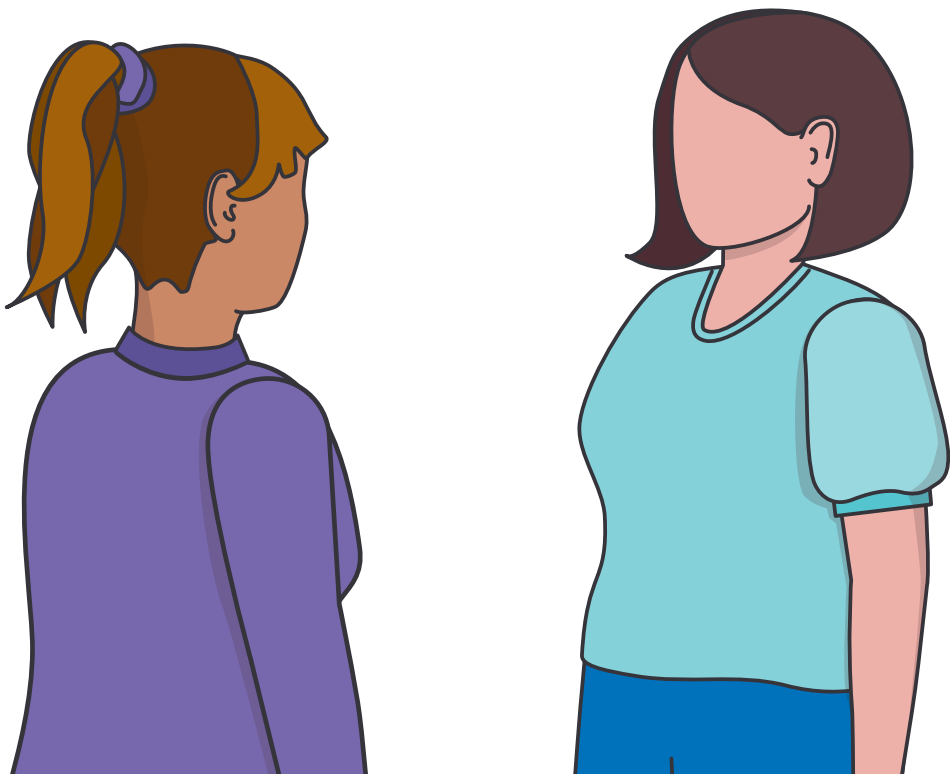
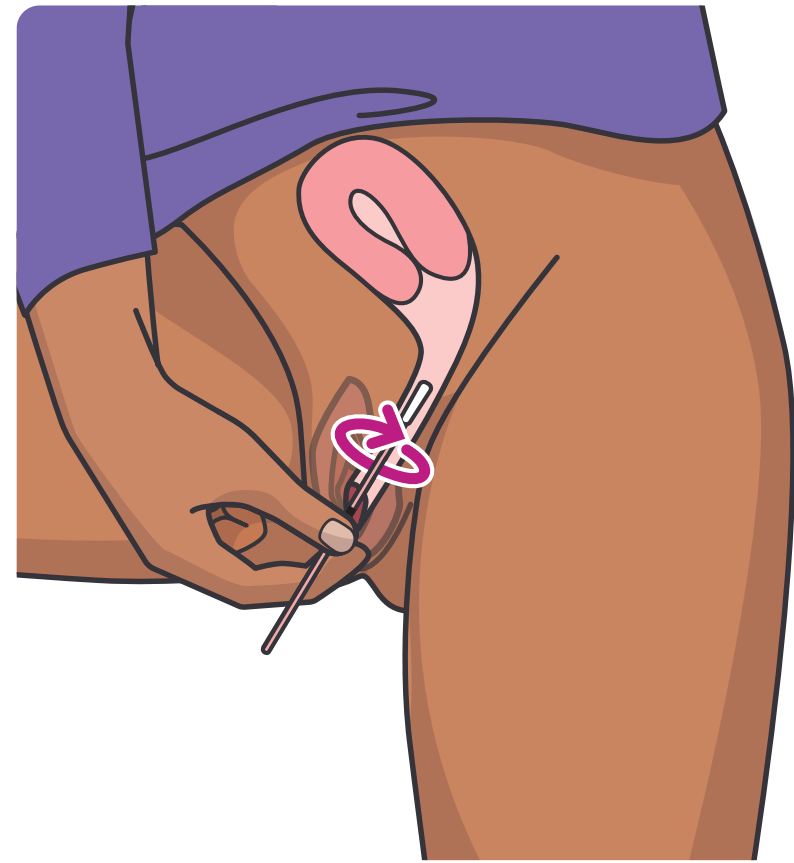
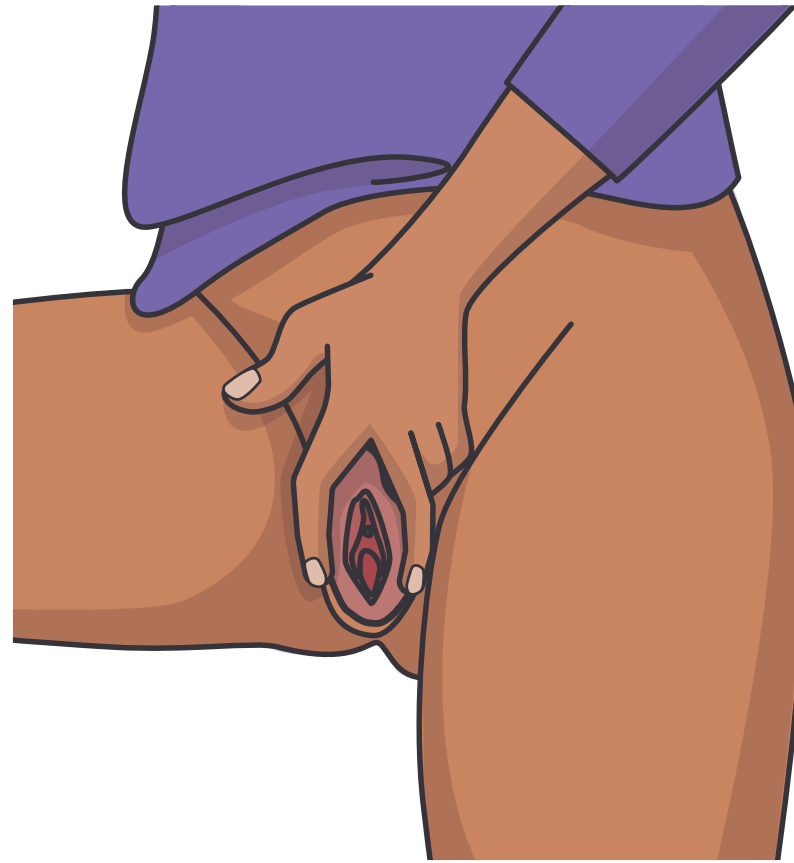
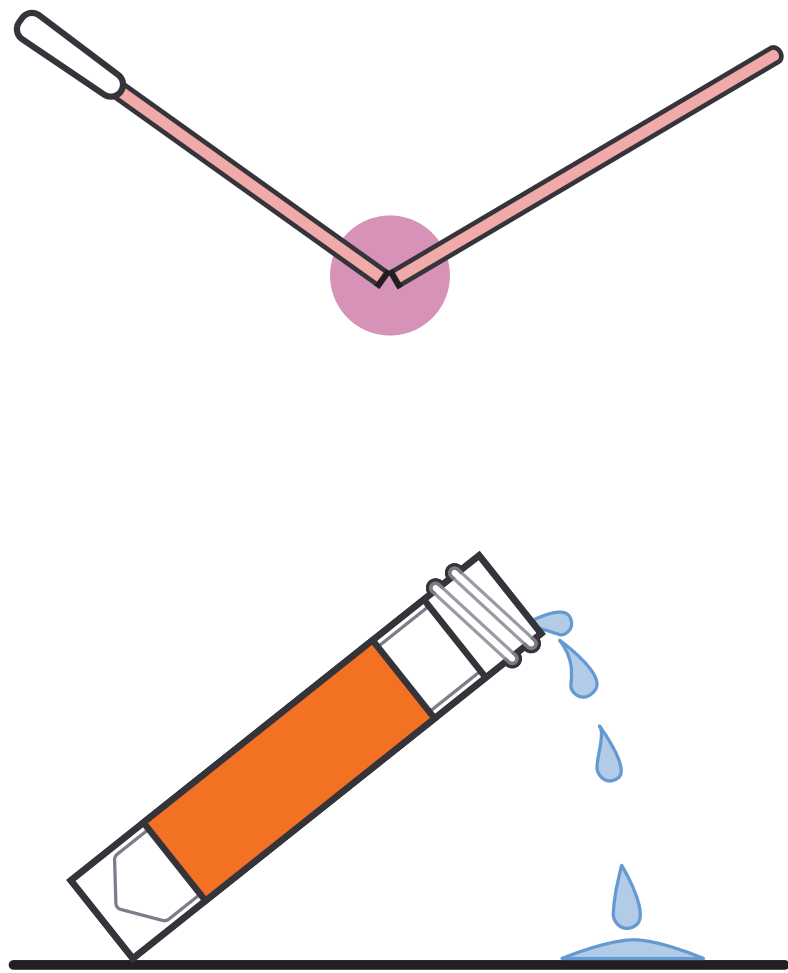
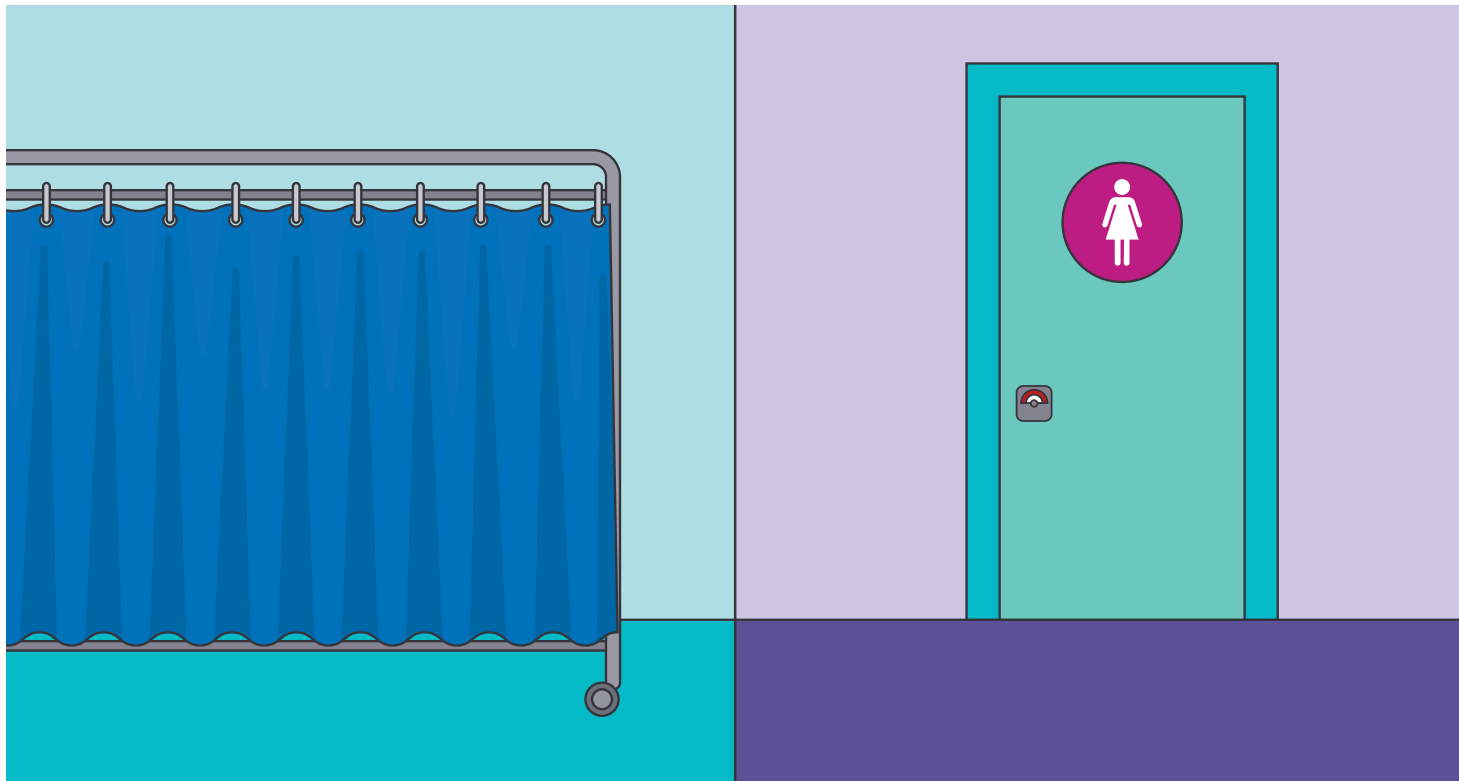
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Easy read

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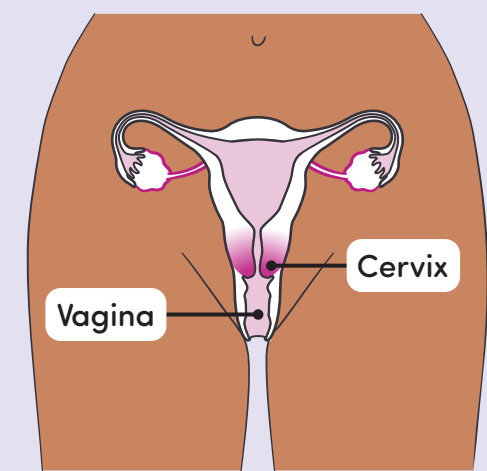
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Are there any risks?

There's a very small chance the swab could break while you're taking your sample. If the swab does break, gently remove it and speak with your health professional in your GP practice.

No screening test is 100% effective. It's very unlikely, but the test can miss HPV even when it's there. There's also no guarantee you will not get HPV in the future.



Evidence shows cervical screening is still one of the best ways to prevent cervical cancer.

Your results

Your sample will be sent to a lab for testing. You'll get your results by letter or phone. Please make sure your GP practice has your up-to-date address and phone number.

There are **three possible results** from HPV self-sampling.

1. No HPV found

Most people will get this result. If no HPV is found in your sample, you will not need any more tests at that time. You'll be invited for a cervical screening test in 5 years.

2. HPV is found

If HPV is found in your sample, you'll be invited for a cervical screening test with a health professional. This test will look for cell changes in your cervix.

3. Unavailable result

If it was not possible to get a result, you'll be invited for a cervical screening test with a health professional.



It's really important you go to any follow-up appointments if you're invited.

Cervical screening can find cell changes early, even if you feel healthy and have no symptoms. This means changes can be monitored or treated, reducing the risk of cancer developing in future.

Changes to look out for

Your GP wants to know if you notice any of these symptoms:

- Bleeding after sex, between periods or after the menopause.
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Find out more

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Translations



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Audio



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About this test

Research shows this test is an effective way of testing for HPV in people who do not regularly go for cervical screening.

Although this test was not developed for HPV self-sampling, it's safe and is already used throughout the NHS to test other types of samples.

What happens to your sample

Your sample may be stored and used for research, service improvement, education and training. If this happens, your personal details will be removed.

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HPV self-sampling

How to take your sample



Scan for video instructions



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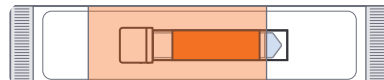
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What's in your kit?

Swab



Sample tube



If anything is missing or damaged, let your health professional know and they'll give you a new kit.

How to take your sample

Step 1

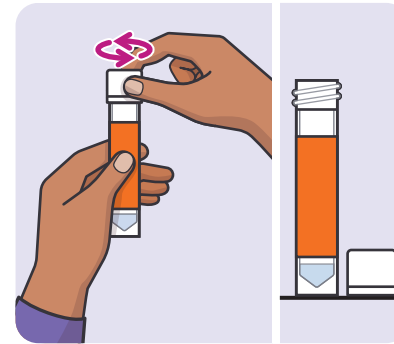
Wash your hands in warm soapy water and dry them well.



Step 2

Unscrew the sample tube without spilling the liquid.

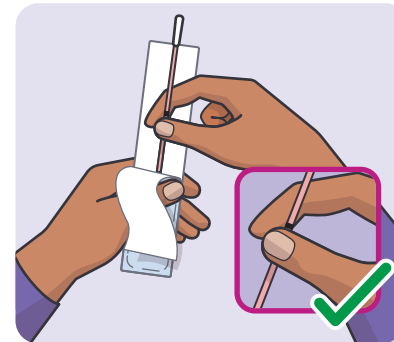
Put the tube upright on a flat surface. You'll need it later.



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Step 4

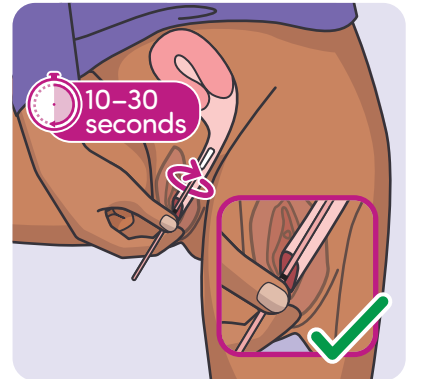
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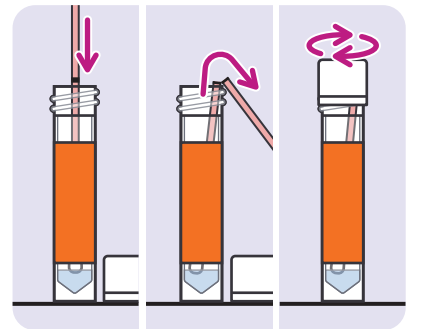
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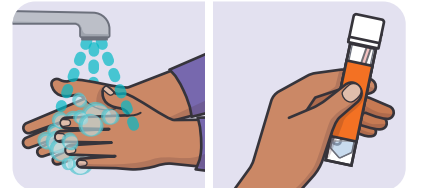
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