

Introduction:

Public Health Wales is pleased to provide this written submission to the Health and Social Care Committee's short inquiry to scrutinise the implementation of the Committee's report *Unheard: Women's journey through gynaecological cancer*.

[Public Health Wales](#) is the national public health agency in Wales and exists to protect and improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities for people in Wales. We are one of the 11 organisations that make up NHS Wales.

Public Health Wales is working with Welsh Government to address relevant recommendations in the report. The Cervical Screening Programme at Public Health Wales welcomes this opportunity to provide updates on our work relating to recommendations 8,9,10,11 and a committee note on vaccination guidance.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government should:

- **work with NHS Wales to achieve the WHO's target of 90 per cent uptake of the HPV vaccine; and**
- **by the end of this Senedd, report on the progress made in relation to meeting the WHO's 2030 vaccination, screening and treatment targets for cervical cancer. And as part of this include data on the incidence of cervical cancer amongst women in Wales and how this has changed during the course of this Senedd.**

Update:

As detailed by Welsh Government in its response to the recommendation, Public Health Wales continues to publish regular data on uptake of HPV vaccine at local health board, local authority and school level to support health boards to target improvements and reduce inequalities in uptake.

Recommendation 9: The Welsh Government should work with Public Health Wales to review its equity strategy to:

- **ensure everyone eligible for cervical screening has the opportunity to take up their offer; and**
- **take more targeted action to specifically address those groups of women where take-up of screening is known to be low.**

Update:

The motivations for attending screening are well established:

- Cervical screening can save your life

- Cervical screening means changes to the cells can be found early when you have the best chance of successful treatment
- Regular cervical screening can prevent cervical cancer from developing

Cervical Screening Wales commissioned independent research across Wales in 2024 specifically looking at the barriers to attending for cervical screening. This work concluded that lack of awareness of screening and the benefits are not a barrier, but the following were factors that were reported:

- Cervical screening tests are embarrassing
- Cervical screening tests are painful
- Scared of what the test might find
- Challenges in appointment booking with the GP surgery

Building on the findings of this research, Cervical Screening Wales has reviewed and redesigned the invitation letter and leaflet, using behavioural science to inform the messaging. This has been focussed on the first invitation for screening to address lower coverage in the 25-29 year age group. Initial feedback from focus groups has been positive and this work is now progressing with an in-service evaluation, comparing against the existing resources to determine the impact on coverage.

A pilot project has also been established to offer further support to individuals who have not responded to their screening offer. This has been implemented with a primary care cluster, working in collaboration with the voluntary sector, to reach out directly to these individuals. The outcome of this work will be assessed in October 2025, with a view to extending this in other regions if successful.

Self-sampling will play an important part in targeting groups with lower uptake and work on this is progressing (see Recommendation 10).

Recommendation 10: The Welsh Government should, in its response to this report, outline what work is being undertaken to ensure that NHS Wales is set up to implement self-sampling at pace, if approved. This should include details of any redirection of resources that might be necessary.

Update:

Cervical Screening Wales has established a project team and is actively working through the range of options and requirements to implement self-sampling within the cervical screening programme in Wales.

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) published their recommendation in June 2025 to offer self-sampling as an option to under-screened individuals. Working to this recommendation will allow a more targeted

focus on improving uptake in those who haven't taken up the offer of screening previously.

This is an exciting opportunity to improve our offer of cervical screening in Wales. The Wales Screening Committee will be updated regularly on progress towards implementation which is anticipated to begin rollout in 2026.

Recommendation 11: The Welsh Government should, in its response to this report, advise how it is working with Public Health Wales to ensure the information provided at cervical screening appointments makes clear that such screening does not test or screen for other gynaecological cancers, and includes information about the symptoms of other gynaecological cancers. This information should also be provided when women attend their breast screening appointment.

Update:

Cervical Screening Wales provides training for new and existing sample takers on a regular basis, with refresher training recommended every 3 years. Sample takers are predominantly primary care (practice nurses/GPs) and sexual health clinic-based staff, so are well-versed in taking a person-centred approach to patient care and adopting the 'every contact counts' principles. The sample taker training covers key issues to discuss as part of the consultation with the individual attending for screening. This includes advising that screening is not a test for cancer and to check there are no symptoms of concern that would preclude that individual from undergoing screening. If an individual discloses symptoms, they should not undergo screening and instead be investigated/referred as appropriate. The consultation facilitates natural points at which appropriate signposting can be undertaken, for example during cervical screening the participant is asked for the date of their last menstrual period, which may naturally lead to discussion around menopause and signposting to other services.

Cervical Screening Wales have updated the leaflet that is sent with every invitation for screening to include information that cervical screening does not screen or test for other gynaecological cancers.

The public facing information provided on the PHW website is being re-platformed and due to go live in early 2026 with updated information to ensure it covers the relevant detail. All public facing screening literature needs to be managed carefully to ensure it is comprehensive, clear, and accessible. This information will be considered in review and will factor where additional information may detract or confuse the key messages around screening.

Committee note:

'We note that, in conjunction with Public Health Wales, the Welsh Government has developed a guide to vaccinations for young people in school years 7 to 11, which includes information on the HPV vaccination offer. We would also like to see this expanded to include information about the changes that happen during puberty/adolescence and what is normal or not.'

Clarification and response:

The guide to vaccinations was produced by PHW as part of a suite of information for young people to support consent and promote HPV vaccination in girls and boys.

Whilst information on puberty and teenage development for school children, which could include information of vaccines they are eligible for during their teenage years, may be of value, it is not considered appropriate to use information designed specifically to support and promote vaccination to include information on other things which may complicate or dilute the key message. This is especially important as there is a known barrier with HPV vaccination about parental anxiety about their children reaching sexual maturity, and there is a risk of reinforcing this.

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