

Research shows self-administered cervical screening has lifesaving potential

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Research from Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington has shown the offer of an HPV self-test could increase the uptake of cervical screening by almost three times for under-screened Māori women.

Cervical cancer is preventable. The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) causes changes in the cells of the cervix that can lead to cancer. Screening for HPV has been shown to prevent more cervical cancers than the cervical smear used in the New Zealand National Cervical Screening Programme. Women can self-administer the HPV test.

The new study, published by the University's Te Tātai Hauora o Hine—Centre for Women's Health Research, shows offering an HPV self-test to under-screened Māori women led to a 59 percent uptake of [screening](#), almost three times greater than for those offered the standard screening method currently used in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Professor Bev Lawton, director of the Centre, says the introduction of the HPV self-test would be lifesaving and is of particular significance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Cervical cancer screening rates have been down across the country since the pandemic; offering this alternative self-test has huge potential to improve these rates," she says.

"If our results were to be duplicated throughout New Zealand, screening coverage could potentially increase to 86 percent for Māori, exceeding the screening goal of the National Cervical Screening Programme."

The study was completed in the Te Tai Tokerau/Northland region. Six primary care clinics in the area participated in the trial, which saw women aged 25–69 years who had not had a cervical smear for equal to or more than four years offered either the HPV self-test (intervention arm)

or the standard cervical smear (control arm).

The offer of an HPV self-test reached 48 percent of Māori women who had not had a cervical screen in more than 10 years and 43 percent who had never been screened, compared with 10 percent and 13 percent respectively for those offered the standard screening method.

Professor Lawton says that although the study focused on Māori, who face inequitable rates of [cervical cancer](#), the results showed an increased screening rate for under-screened non-Māori women who took the HPV self-test as well.

"The longer we don't have this test available, the more women will get cervical [cancer](#) unnecessarily, and some of these women will die," she says.

"We want the Government to urgently 'push the button' and give New Zealand [women](#) access to this gold standard screen."

More information: Evelyn Jane MacDonald et al. Reaching under-screened/never-screened indigenous peoples with human papilloma virus self-testing: A community-based cluster randomised controlled trial, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/ajo.13285](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajo.13285)

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