

Cervical screening without a speculum boosts uptake among older patients

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Offering cervical screening without a speculum increases uptake among older women, new research has found.

The study, published today in the *British Journal of General Practice* and led by Dr. Anita Lim from the School of Cancer & Pharmaceutical Sciences, was conducted at 10 GP practices in East London. A group of 784 women aged 50-64 who were overdue for [screening](#) were randomized to either receive a letter offering the choice of having a clinician-taken sample without a speculum or a self-sampling kit; or to have usual care.

Researchers found 17% more women were screened when they had the option not to use a speculum during the exam. Instead, a doctor or nurse could take a vaginal sample without a speculum.

Under-screened and unscreened women have the highest risk of developing [cervical cancer](#). Cervical cancer disproportionately affects women over 65. Many women have a fear or dislike of the speculum, and speculum use can be particularly painful for women with menopause.

Screening without the speculum, in addition to self-sampling—which requires individuals to obtain a kit and collect their own samples—are desirable options for women at higher risk of cervical cancer.

"HPV self-sampling is set to be a game-changer for cervical screening that will help more women get screened, but we know that some women don't feel confident taking a sample themselves. In our study we tried out a completely novel approach of having a doctor or nurse take a vaginal swab for cervical screening. We found that offering this alongside self-sampling to [older women](#) overdue screening gave an impressive boost to screening [uptake](#) that was 17% higher than women offered usual care," said Dr. Anita Lim, senior epidemiologist from the King's College London School of Cancer & Pharmaceutical Sciences.

She added, "This uptake is higher than what we've seen in previous UK

studies offering self-sampling alone. Our study shows that non-speculum clinician sampling is another promising tool for cervical screening to help us get more women screened and one that could easily be integrated into existing clinical care."

More information: Rebecca Landy et al, Non-speculum sampling approaches for cervical screening in older women: randomised controlled trial, *British Journal of General Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.3399/BJGP.2021.0350](https://doi.org/10.3399/BJGP.2021.0350)

Provided by King's College London

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