

Ministear airson Slàinte Phoblach is Slàinte
Bhoireannach
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Scottish Government
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24 March 2026

Dear Convener,

I am writing to inform the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee about the publication of our Cervical Cancer Elimination Action Plan, which is due to be published on 25 March.

We have committed to the ambitious target of eliminating cervical cancer by 2040. This is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as reaching and maintaining an incidence rate of below 4 per 100,000 women. Estimates suggest the current incidence in Scotland is between 8 and 9 women per 100,000, so elimination is within reach. Indeed, current modelling suggests we could eliminate it before 2040 for those in our least deprived areas. However, equity is central to our elimination goals, and we are determined that we will achieve elimination across the whole population.

In Scotland, we already meet the WHO target of 90% of women treated once cervical disease is identified, and I am confident we will continue to do so. However, increasing the uptake of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination and cervical screening is essential if we are to achieve elimination.

Cervical screening uptake rates continue to be much lower than our targets, particularly among certain demographics, such as women experiencing higher levels of deprivation, or women from certain ethnic minority backgrounds. The Plan recognises these inequalities

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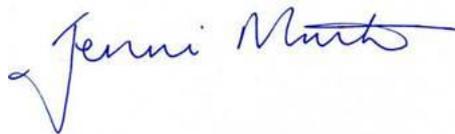
and outlines strategies to reduce or remove barriers to screening. This includes the roll-out of self sampling. A pilot is launching with some of Scotland's most deprived areas for participating GP practices to provide self-sampling kits to women who have not been screened in some time. This can help to remove the barriers women experience attending a cervical screening in-person appointment, including challenges with making the time to attend; embarrassment or anxiety; and previous negative experiences of screening appointments. The learning from this pilot will be used to determine how to expand self-sampling nationally for under-screened women, in a way that is effective, sustainable, and removes as many barriers to participating in screening as possible.

We will also seek to increase uptake in HPV vaccination rates. At present, the one-dose HPV vaccine in Scotland protects against nine HPV types, and is offered to both girls and boys. The evidence available clearly shows a dramatic reduction in HPV infection and high grade cervical disease in those who have been vaccinated, with no cervical cancer cases detected to date in fully vaccinated women.

We know that HPV vaccination is also affected by inequality in uptake, and therefore we have committed to addressing this, for example by piloting innovative approaches to reach under-vaccinated groups, with evaluation reports guiding national rollout; working with key partners to determine how best to reach young people who are home schooled; and publishing recommendations on how to improve consent processes, to make it easier to access the vaccine.

We will work closely with the NHS and other partners to pursue an evidence-based approach to achieving our vaccination and screening goals. We will regularly review and evaluate the work undertaken, refining and improving our approaches where appropriate, to ensure our strategies are effective and are producing positive results. We will closely monitor and report on our progress towards eliminating cervical cancer, for example through the Public Health Scotland statistical publications on cervical screening and HPV vaccination. I am confident that, by implementing our Action Plan with the support of our partners, we will achieve cervical cancer elimination by 2040.

Yours sincerely/Regards,



Jenni Minto MSP

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