



**BLUE LIGHT  
TOGETHER**



**Smear tests: Approaching  
the conversation with your  
manager**

# Why is it important to talk about this topic?

A cervical screening, or a 'smear test' as it's more commonly known, is a free health test which helps to prevent cervical cancer by checking for a virus called HPV and any abnormal cells. The test is offered to anybody with a cervix, between the ages of 25 to 64.

The test has the potential to be lifesaving, however, according to the [NHS](#), nearly **a third** of eligible people (around 4.6 million) did not take up their latest test.

## Why do people not attend?

There are many reasons why somebody may choose not to attend a cervical screening such as a negative experience previously, misconceptions or worries. However, scheduling a test around work commitments can also be a significant factor.

[Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust](#), the UK's leading cervical cancer charity, found that 80% of women that work full time have been unable to get a convenient cervical screening appointment, 15% have delayed their appointment because they felt unable to take time off work, and 1 in 5 have used their annual leave to attend an appointment. The reasons cited for work being a challenge included inflexible bosses, too much work, shift patterns and it being difficult to ask to attend, all of which are challenges commonly experienced by members of the Blue Light community.



# Addressing the barriers



“I work for the NHS and had cervical cancer 4 years ago. I’ve had to have regular check-ups since and have to use my annual leave for these appointments. One of my check-ups came back with HPV again so I had to have extra appointments which meant extra annual leave. The ironic thing is I even work in the hospital I have my check ups in. It’s such an important test and we should make it easier to attend so that everyone has the same chance to reduce their risk of getting cancer. It makes me angry that workplaces make it so difficult for women to attend appointments be it for smear tests or check-ups.”

**An NHS worker who spoke anonymously to Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust within their report**



At Blue Light Together, we believe that work commitments should not be a barrier when accessing cervical screenings. As a result, we have created the following guide to support you in navigating conversations about smear tests at work.



# Your guide:

## 1. Consider time and place

Find a suitable place and time to talk to your manager when they're not busy. You may need to request a brief meeting to talk privately. Try to book your appointment in advance so you can give them plenty of notice.



## 2. Be direct and clear

Clearly express the purpose of the meeting, for example "I'd like to discuss a personal health matter with you." Time off for smear tests should be normalised, and it shouldn't be a taboo subject to discuss, so there's no need to sugar coat it.



## 3. Explain the importance

Unfortunately, not everybody will be aware of the importance of cervical screenings. So it may help to briefly explain the importance of the appointment as a form of preventative healthcare.



## 4. Discuss disruption and work arrangements

Be realistic about the time you are going to need off for the appointment. The NHS states that the whole appointment should only take around ten minutes, but do take into consideration travel and potential delays in the waiting room. Be honest about how your work and responsibilities may be disrupted on the day. You may want to discuss potential work arrangements for while you're away.



## 5. Maintain professionalism and follow up

Keep the conversation professional and focused on the specific request, you don't need to go into excessive detail about your personal health in order to justify the time off. After the discussion, thank your manager for their understanding and consider sending a follow up email which summarises the key information such as the date and time of the appointment, and any agreed work arrangements, so that it is all documented in writing.