



# Cervical Screening Awareness & Attitudes

Market Research 2023

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**CervicalCheck**  
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRBHEACS  
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service



# Background

- Every year in Ireland, about 250 people get cervical cancer.
- The majority of cervical cancers are caused by persistent infection with certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV). Most people who are infected with HPV are able to clear the virus themselves. Those who can't maybe at higher risk of developing cervical cancer.
- Cervical screening checks the health of your cervix. It involves checking for the presence of HPV (HPV cervical screening).
- All women and people with a cervix aged 25-65 are eligible for CervicalCheck.
- Understanding public knowledge and awareness around breast cancer and breast cancer screening is important.



# HE Research Objectives

Key Objective: To identify and explore peoples' perceptions of cervical screening in Ireland and what drives and inhibits them to attend screening.

To gain insights into:

- public awareness & understanding of cervical cancer
- public knowledge on cervical screening
- any changes in levels of knowledge and attitudes since 2021.



# HE Methodology



An online survey was conducted in June 2023 among women and people with a cervix who were eligible for cervical screening



The survey was shared among a trusted market research panel provider



A total of **1,029** women and people with a cervix aged 25-65 years completed the survey

*Where possible, results from the survey were compared to a similar research survey conducted in 2021*

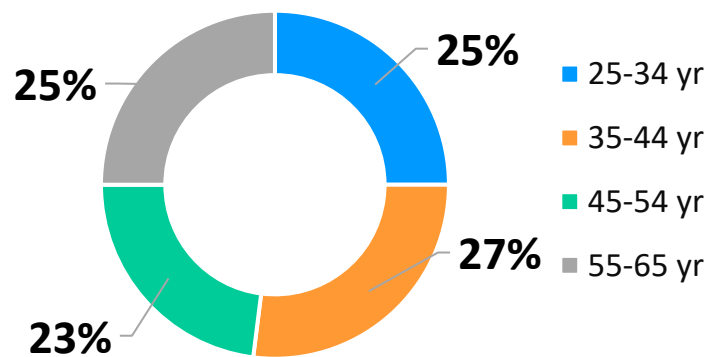
# HE Participants

Nationality: 8 in 10 participants were Irish nationals

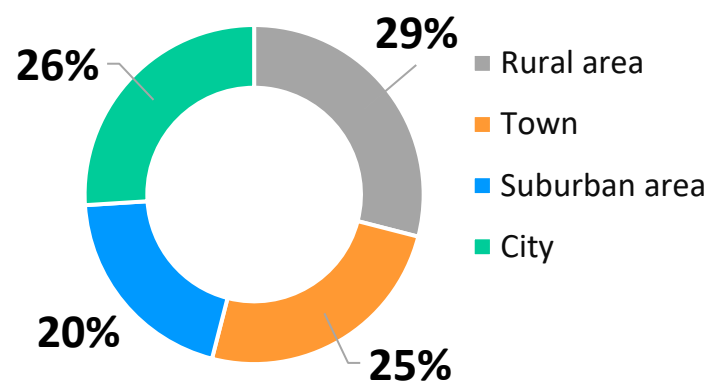
Ethnicity: 8 in 10 participants identified as White Irish



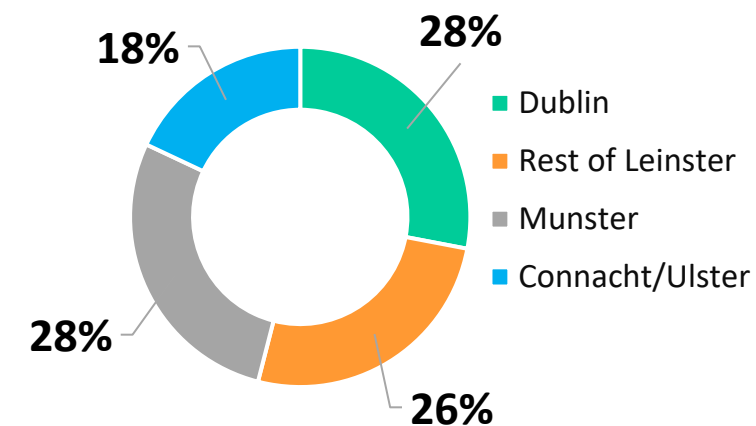
Age



Place of living



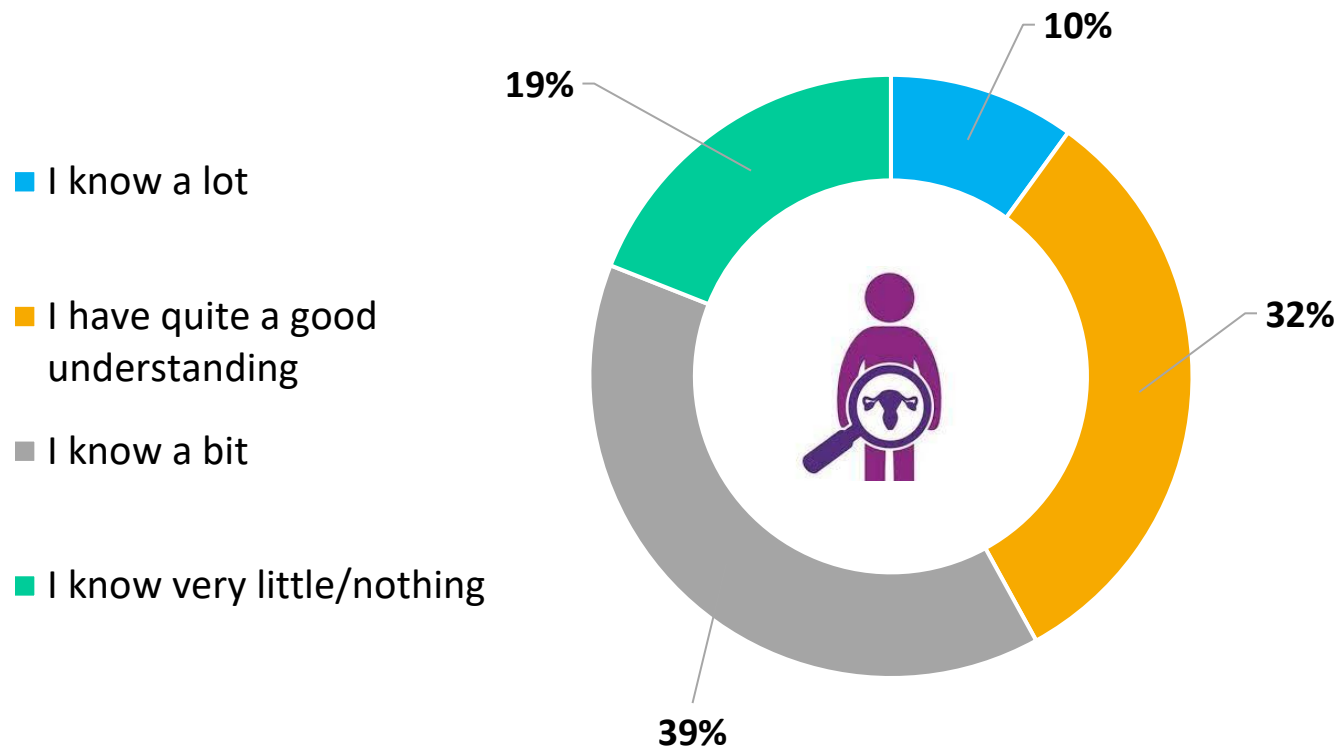
Part of Ireland





# Knowledge about cervical cancer

Q. How would you describe your level of knowledge about cervical cancer?



Number of respondents = 1,029 (women or people with a cervix aged 25 – 65 years)





# Knowledge about cervical cancer

Q. To the best of your knowledge, is there anything that can be done to reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer?

Factors that can reduce risk

**86%** said attending cervical screening when invited

**74%** - having regular check ups

**60%** - living a healthy lifestyle

**57%** - getting the HPV vaccine

**53%** - not smoking

**49%** - practicing safe sex/limiting no. of sexual partners

Q. At what age do you think a woman or person with a cervix is most at risk of developing cervical cancer?

- Just over 4 in 10 (43%) believed that you are at risk at any age from in the 20s onwards.
- Younger survey respondents (aged 25-34 yrs) were more likely to believe you are most at risk in your 30s and 20s compared to older respondents.

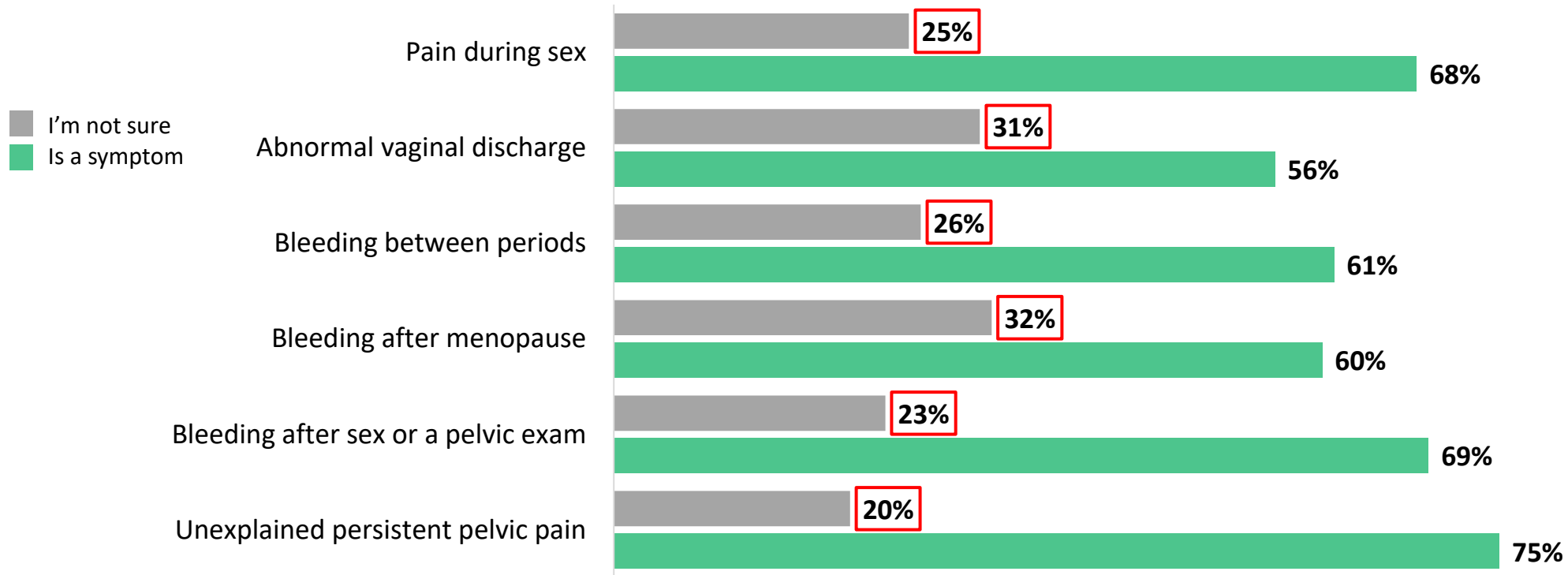




# Knowledge about cervical cancer



Q. Which of the following do you think could be symptoms of cervical cancer?



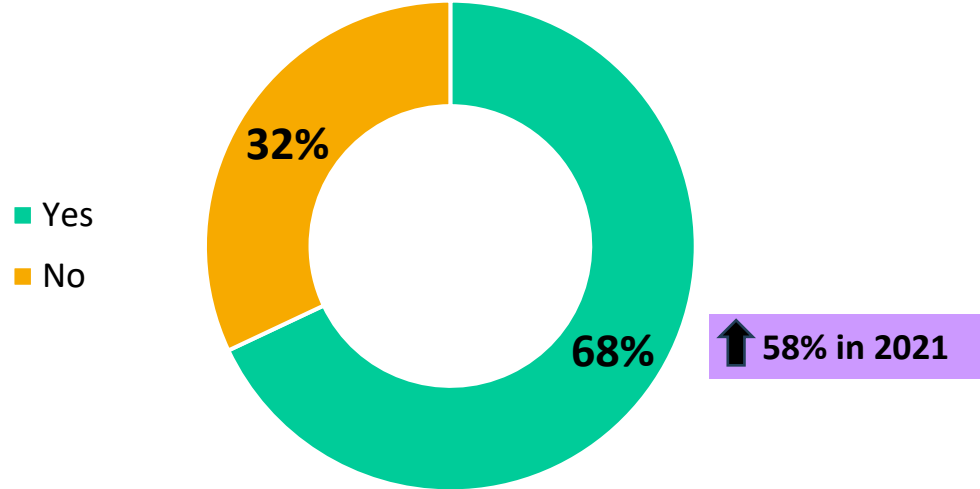
Knowledge of cervical cancer symptoms was ok  
There was some uncertainty around symptoms – 1 in 3 respondents were unsure about abnormal vaginal discharge being a symptom



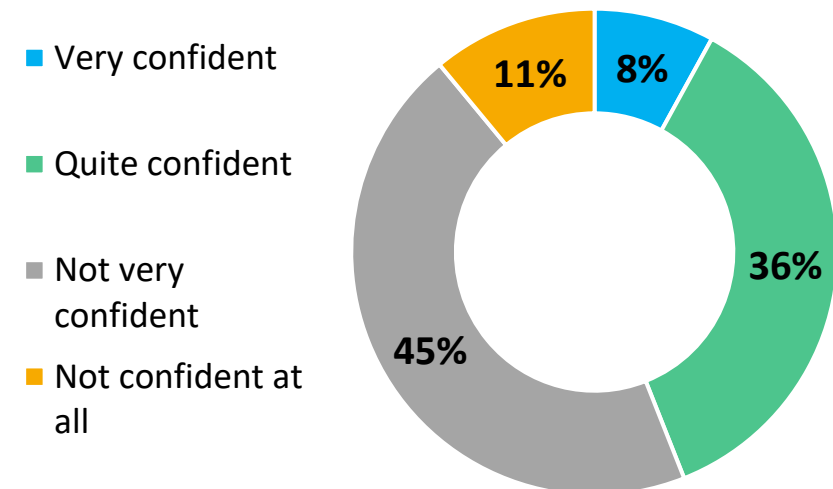


# Watching out for symptoms of cervical cancer

Q. Do you watch out for symptoms of cervical cancer?



Q. How confident do you feel you would be at spotting the symptoms of cervical cancer?



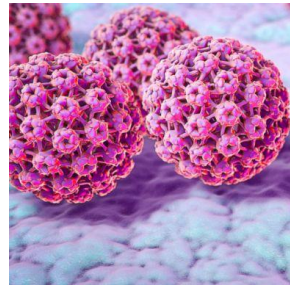
Nearly 7 in 10 participants watch out for symptoms of cervical cancer

Over half (56%) were not confident in being able to spot the symptoms



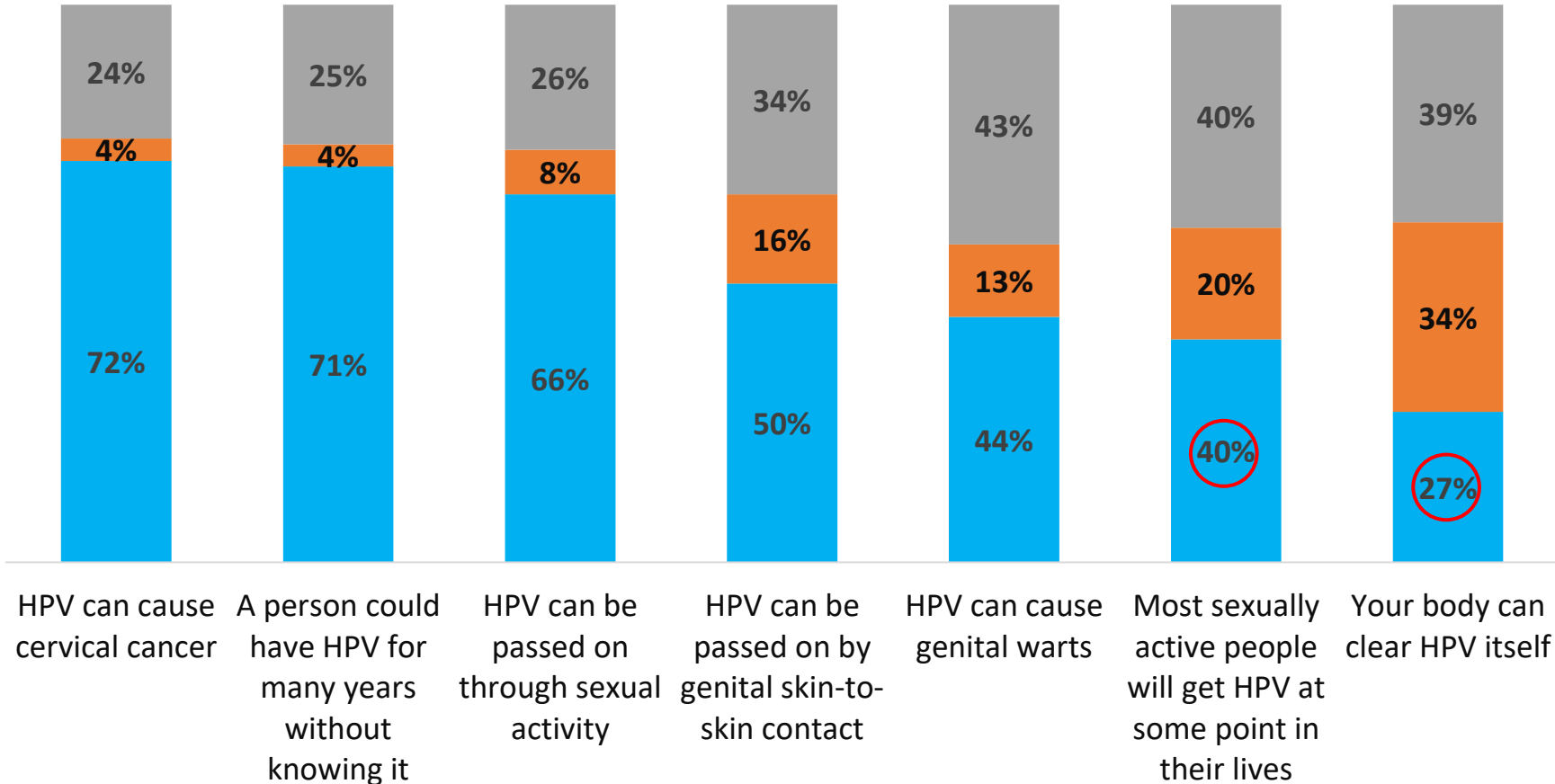


# Knowledge about HPV



Q. Thinking about HPV (human papillomavirus), could you tell me whether you believe the following statements to be true or false

■ TRUE ■ FALSE ■ NOT SURE

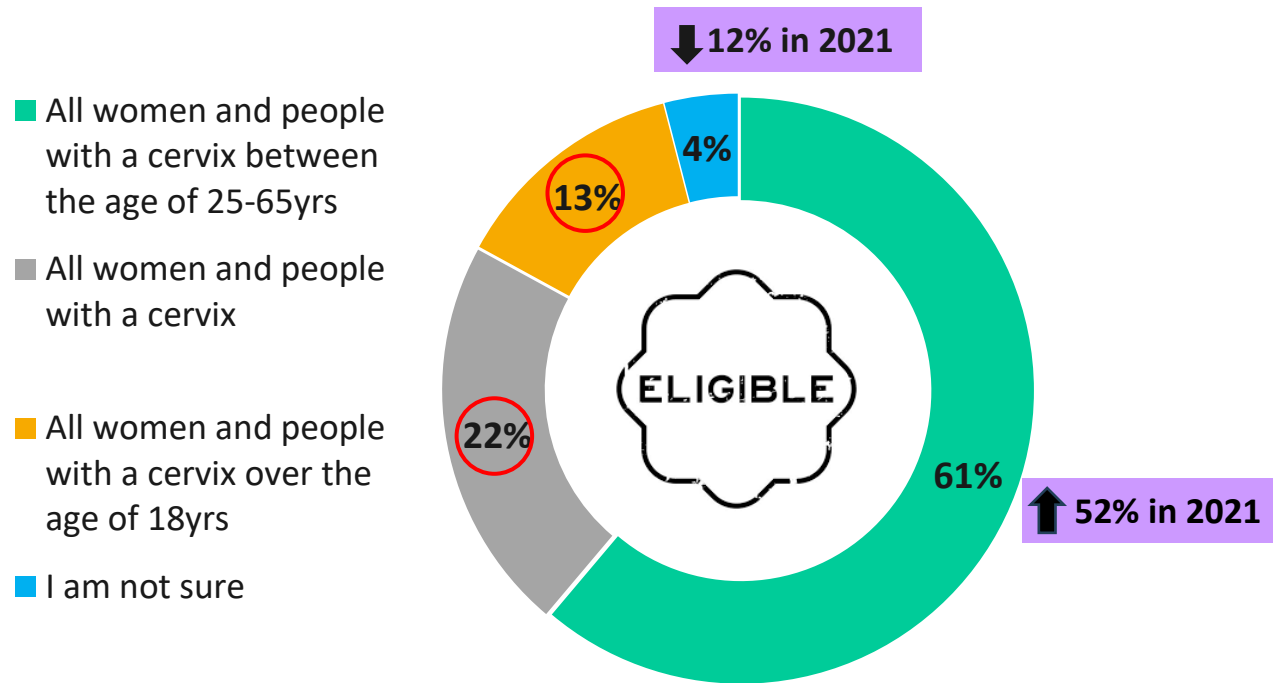


- ⚠ Only 40% of respondents knew that most sexually active people will get HPV at some point.
- ⚠ Only 27% knew that the body can clear HPV itself.
- ⚠ High levels of uncertainty around the facts about HPV.



# Knowledge about cervical screening

Q. Who is eligible for the cervical screening programme in Ireland?



Q. To the best of your knowledge, why is it important for women and people with a cervix to attend for cervical screening?

- ✓ 79% agreed it is important so abnormal cells can be found early.
- ✓ 76% agreed that cervical cancer is more treatable if found early.
- ✓ 71% agreed that it is important to prevent cervical cancer developing.

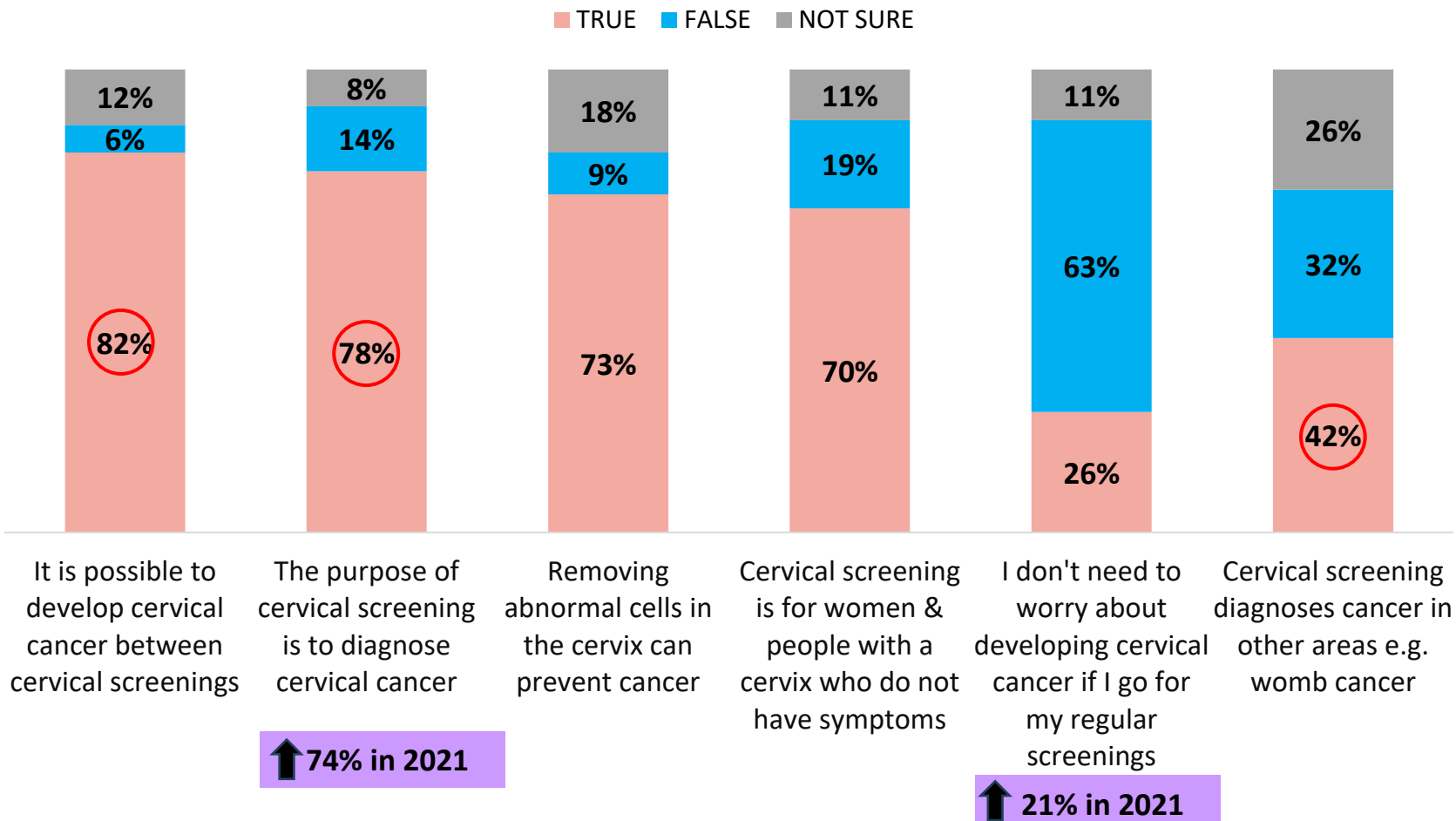
Knowledge about why attending for cervical screening is important was good

**Only 6 in 10** participants knew that all women & people with a cervix between the age of 25-65 yrs are eligible for cervical screening



# Knowledge about cervical screening

Q. Thinking about Ireland's cervical screening programme, please say, to the best of your knowledge, whether you believe the following statements to be true or false:



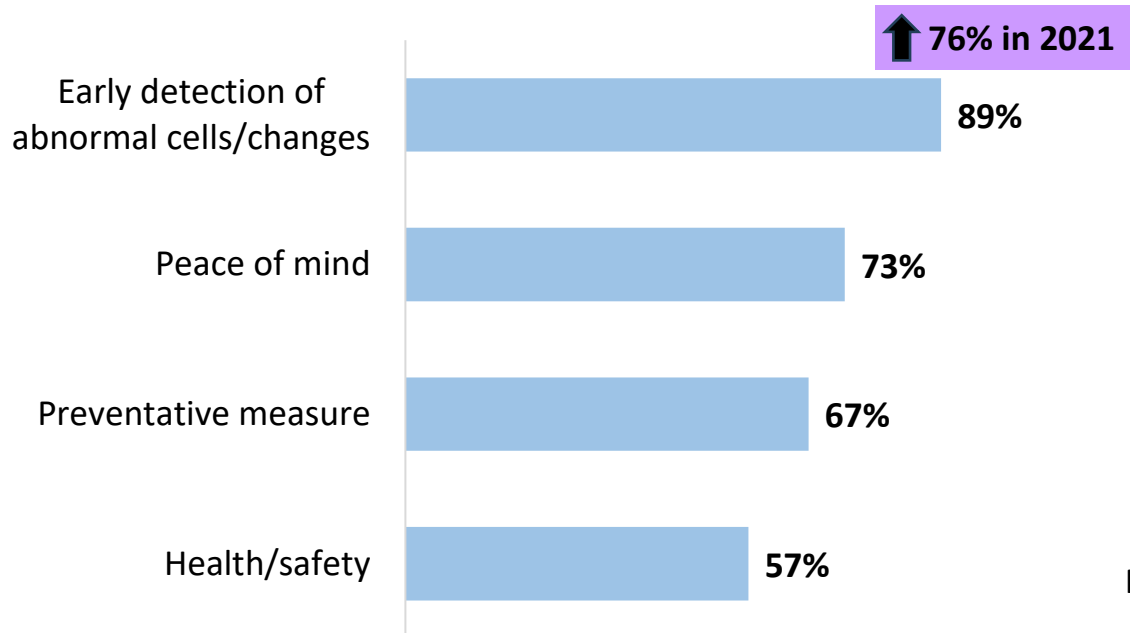
- ✓ Most women knew that cervical cancer can develop between screenings.
- ⚠ High percentage of respondents believed the purpose of cervical screening is to diagnose cervical cancer.
- ⚠ Over four in ten thought cervical screening can diagnose other cancers.



# Knowledge about cervical screening

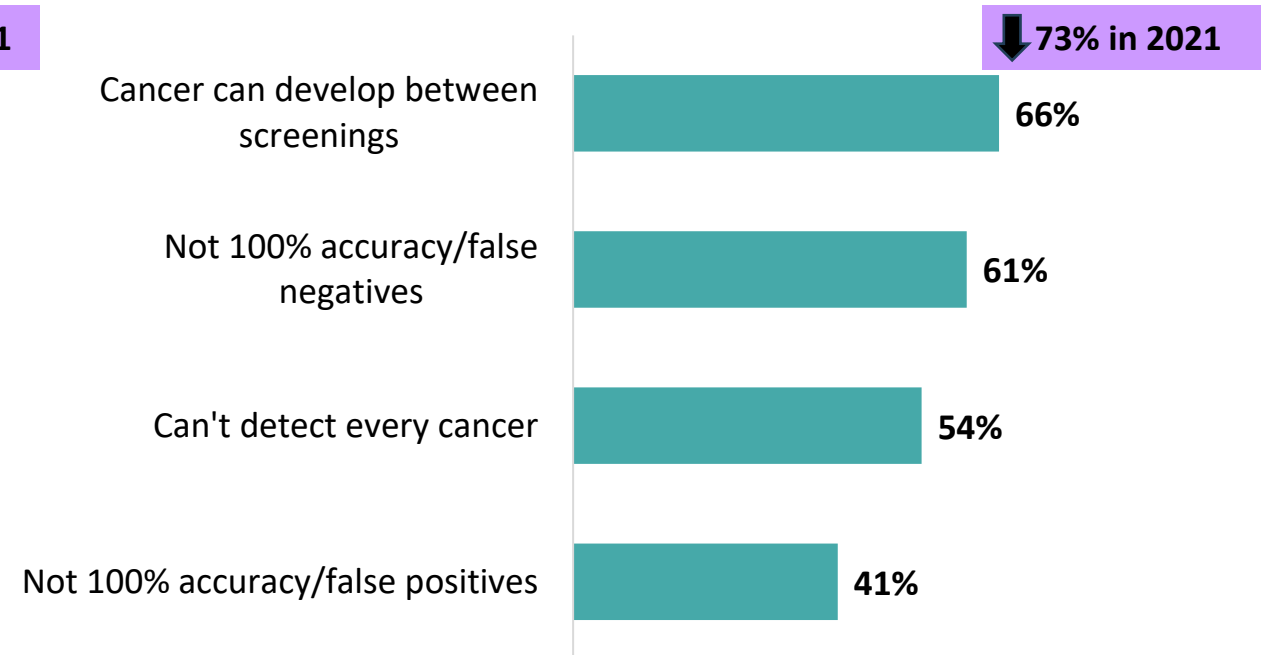
## Benefits cited

Q. From the best of your knowledge what are the benefits, if any of cervical screening?



## Limitations cited

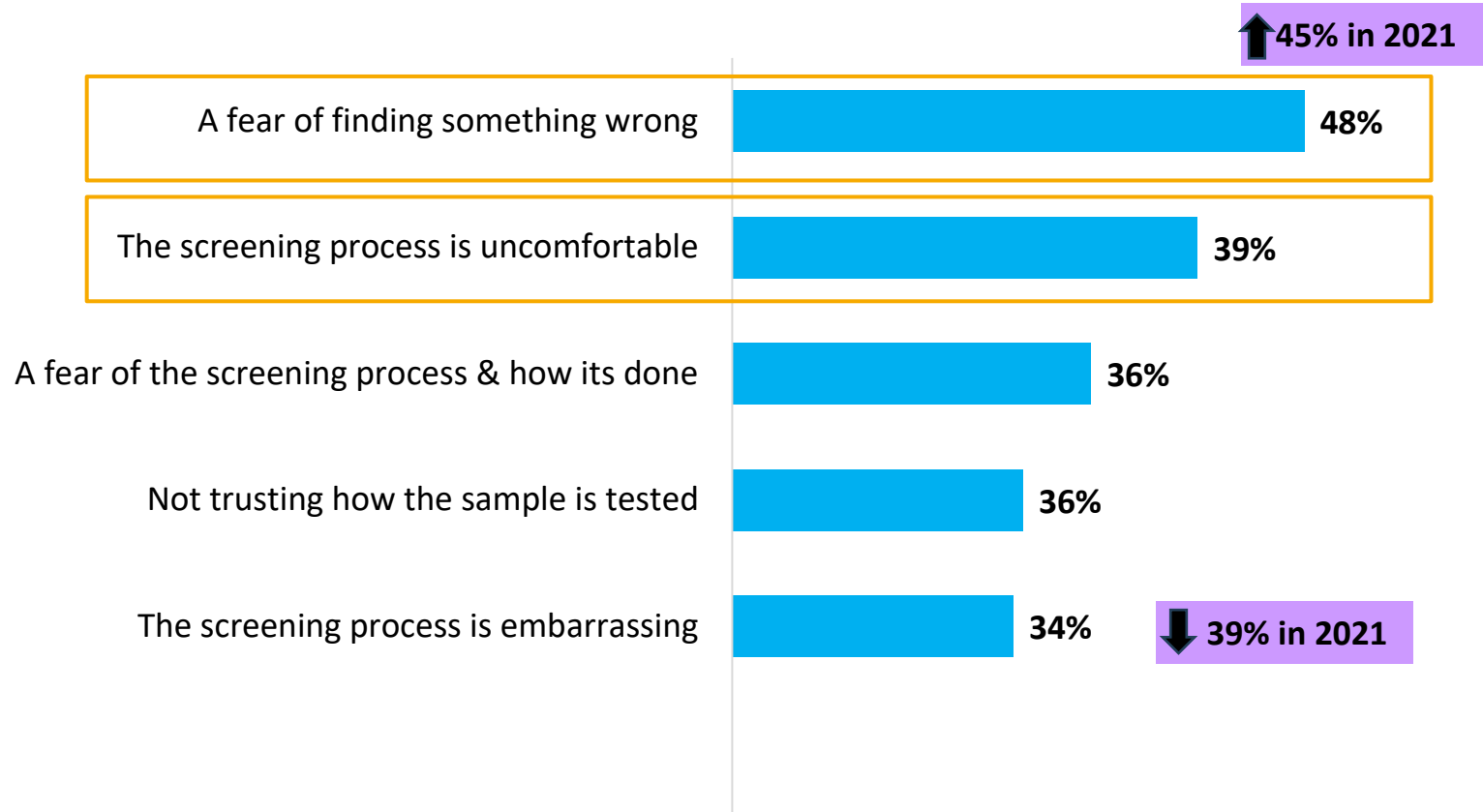
Q. From the best of your knowledge what are the limitations, if any, of cervical screening? (Open-ended response)





# Barriers to attending cervical screening

Q. In your opinion, what are the main barriers/ challenges of attending cervical screening?



- Close to half of were fearful of finding something wrong.
- Nearly one in four found the process uncomfortable.
- Over a third did not trust how the screening sample was tested.
- One in three found the screening process embarrassing.



# Barriers to attending cervical screening by age

## Respondents aged 25 – 34 years

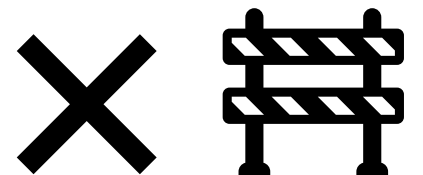
- Most likely to fear finding something wrong, fear the screening process and how its done and find the process embarrassing. Younger women were also more likely to have limited/no time to attend a screening appointment.

## Respondents aged 35 – 44 years

- Most likely not to trust how the sample is tested.

## Resondents aged 45 – 65 years

- Most likely to claim they never registered with CervicalCheck.

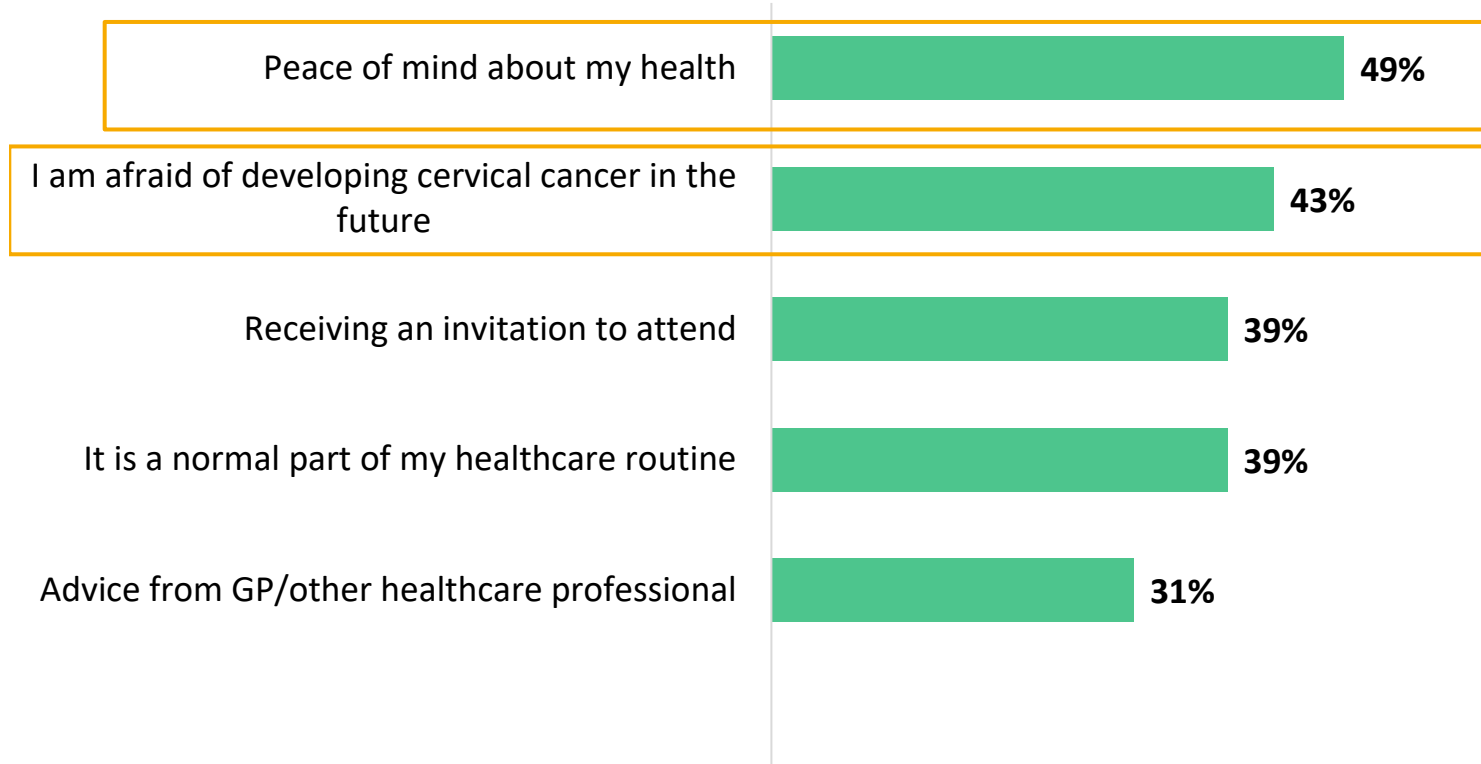






# Motivations for attending cervical screening

Q. In your opinion, what are the main motivations to attend cervical screening?



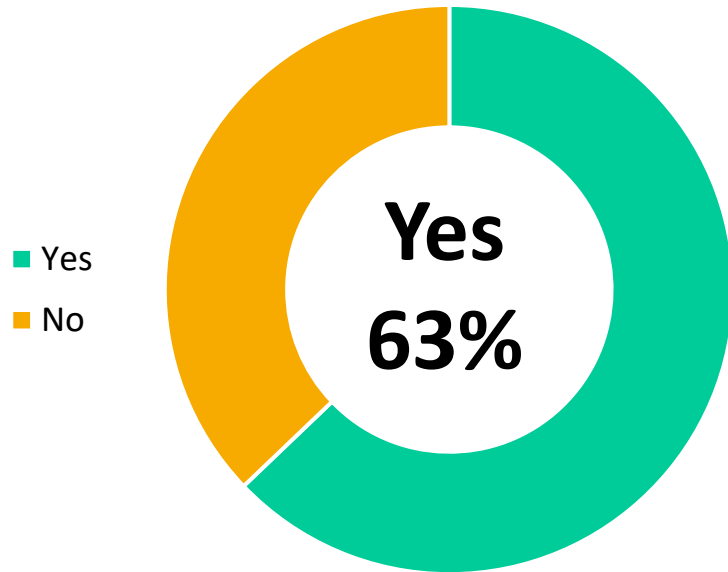
- Almost half claimed that giving peace of mind about their health was a key motivator.
- Fear of developing cervical cancer in the future was another key motivator.
- Receiving an invitation to attend was cited as a motivator by nearly 4 in 10 participants.

**9 in 10** participants stated they would be likely to attend their next cervical screening appointment



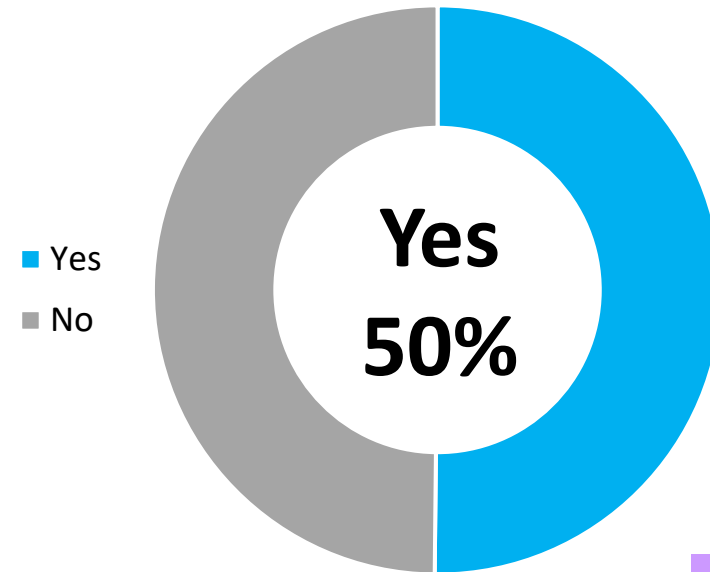
# Awareness of HPV cervical screening

Q. Before today were you aware of the introduction of HPV cervical screening?



↑ 49% in 2021

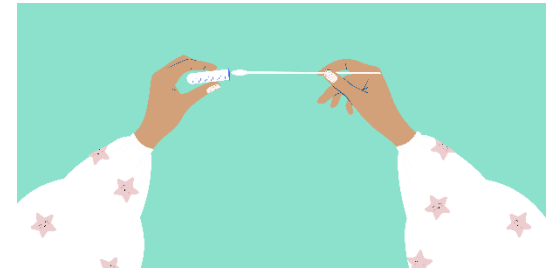
Q. People aged 30 to 65 will now be screened every 5 years instead of every 3 years, if they don't have a HPV infection. Were you aware of this before today?



↑ 31% in 2021

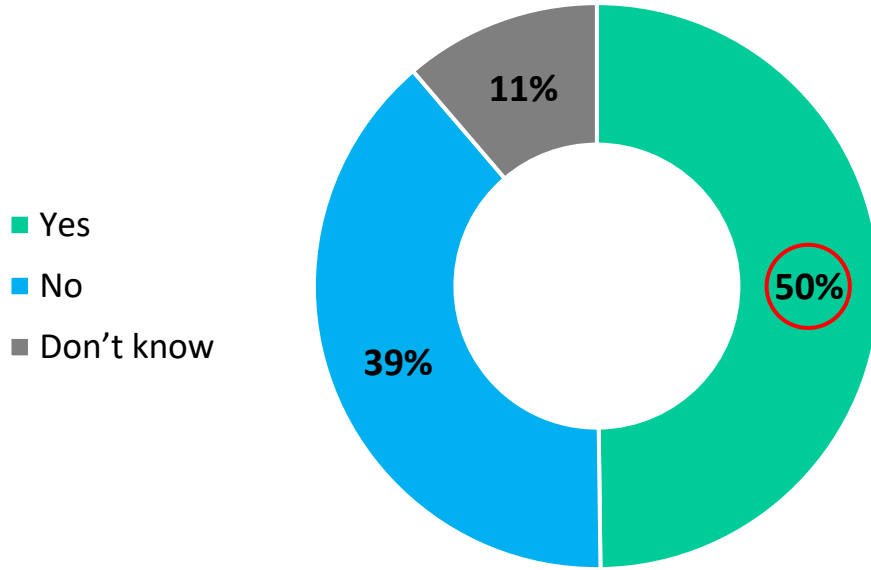


# Views on HPV self-sampling

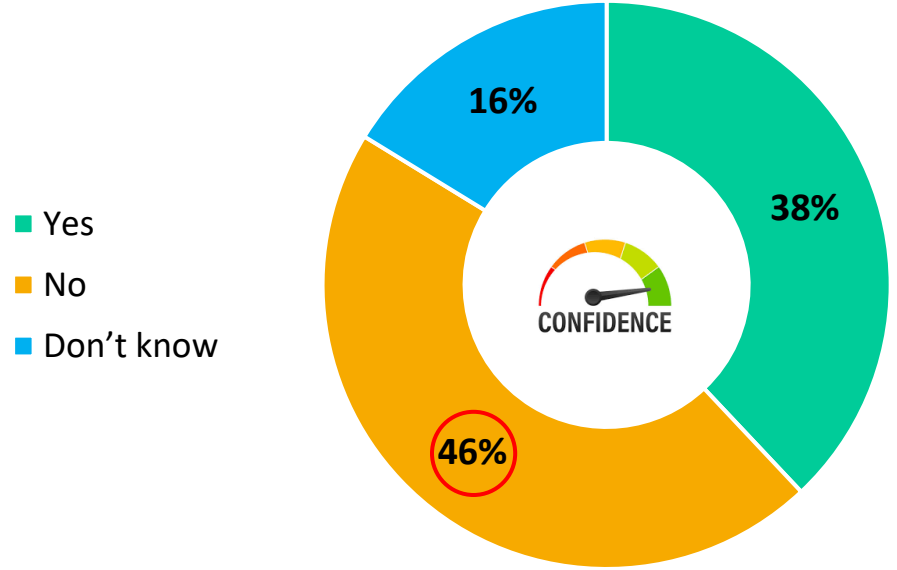


One new approach to cervical screening is to collect your own sample at home with a special kit, which would be sent to you though the post (this is called self-sampling). Self-sampling involves a swab (like a long cotton bud) that you use to collect a sample from your vagina.

Q. Would you prefer self-sampling rather than having your doctor or nurse do your cervical screening test?



Q. Would you feel confident in the result of the test if you took the sample at home by yourself?





# Attitudes towards CervicalCheck

Q. Thinking about CervicalCheck- to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements



↑ 74% in 2021



**Almost 8 in 10 participants (78%)** felt positive about CervicalCheck.

**8 in 10 (81%)** agreed CervicalCheck provides high-quality and safe patient care.

**8 in 10 (81%)** agreed CervicalCheck has competent staff that get the job done.



**Almost 7 in 10 (77%)** felt CervicalCheck communicates in an open and honest way.

**Almost 8 in 10 (78%)** agreed that CervicalCheck puts the interests of people first.

**Almost 8 in 10 (79%)** agreed that CervicalCheck delivers the best possible outcomes for people.

↑ 66% in 2021



# Self-reported attendance at screening appointments

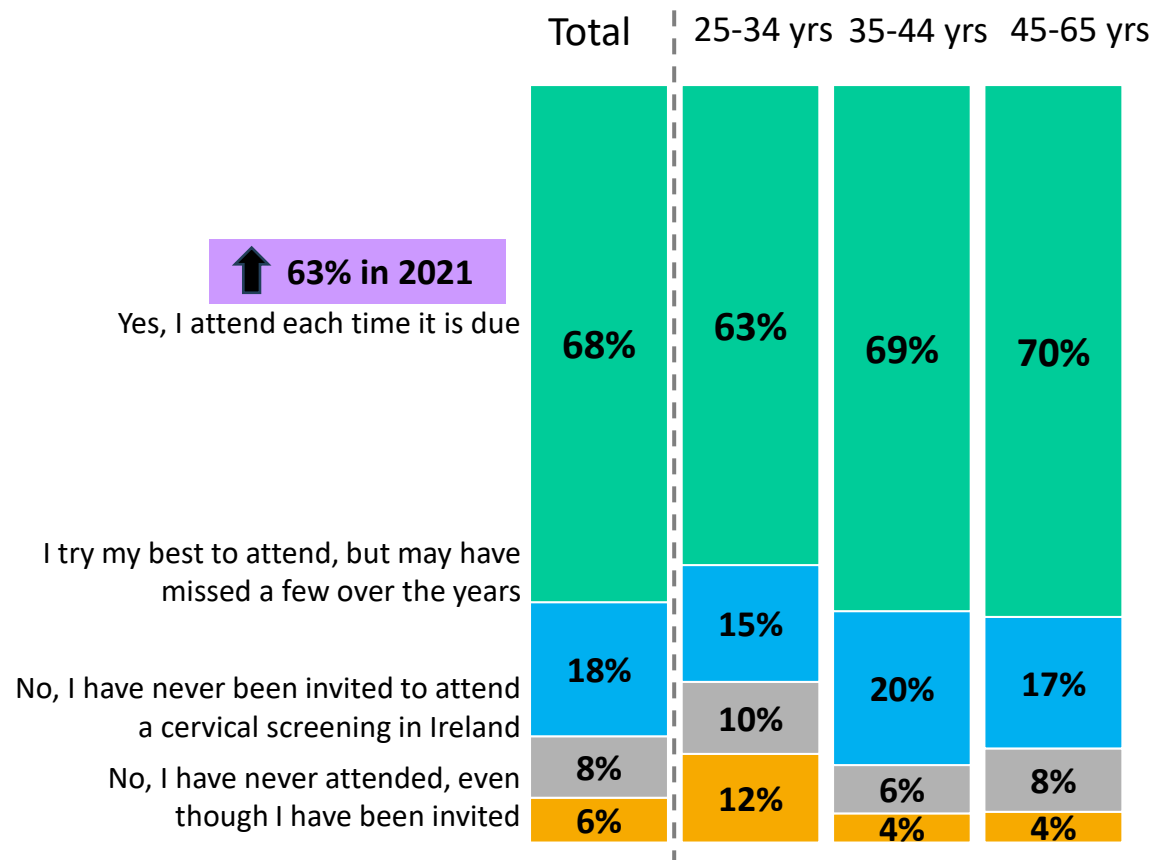
How likely are you to attend your next cervical screening appointment?

**9 in 10 (90%)**

participants stated they would be likely to attend their next cervical screening appointment

↔ 91% in 2021

Do you attend cervical screening when invited to do so?



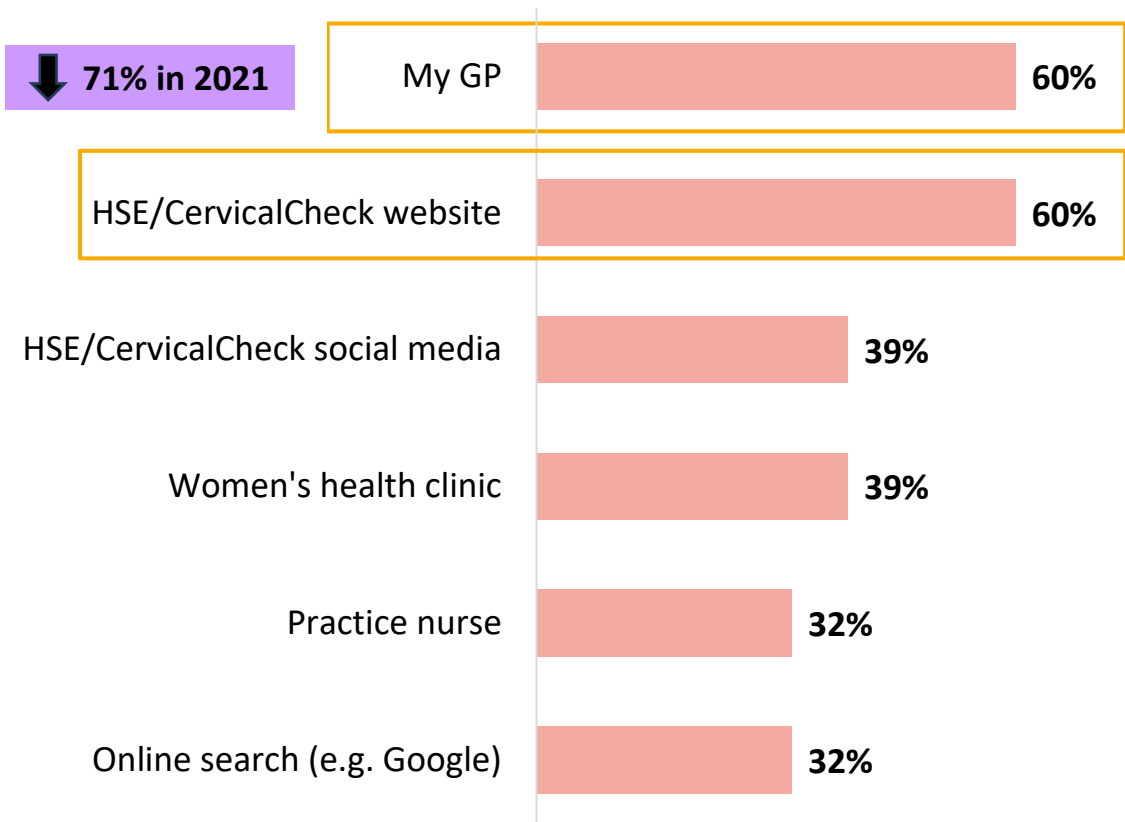
↑ 63% in 2021

Those aged 25-34 years were less likely to attend screening when invited than older women



# Information and support needs

When it comes to information on cervical screening and cervical cancer, where would you go to get information?



Q. Thinking about cervical screening, on what topics, if any, do you need more information?



Nearly half of participants wanted to know more about what symptoms to look out for between screenings.



1 in 4 participants wanted more information on how to reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer.



1 in 3 wanted to know more about the link between HPV & cervical cancer.



## Summary of key findings

- Women and people with a cervix were uncertain about some symptoms of cervical cancer.
- Knowledge about HPV was mixed. Participants were uncertain about some HPV facts.
- Knowledge about cervical screening was mixed –over 4 in 10 thought cervical screening diagnoses cancers in other areas.
- Main barriers to availing of cervical screening were – (1) a fear of finding something wrong and (2) finding the screening process uncomfortable.
  - Those aged 25-34 years were most likely to fear finding something wrong, fear the screening process and find the process embarrassing.
  - Those aged 35-44 years were most likely not to trust how the sample is tested.
- HPV cervical screening: 6 in 10 of those surveyed were aware of the switch to HPV screening. Only half of participants were aware of the changes to screening intervals.
- Half of participants indicated they would prefer self-sampling. 38% of participants would feel confident in the result of the self-test.



# HE Summary of key findings

- Nearly 7 in 10 participants watch out for symptoms of cervical cancer (68%) in 2023 up 10% since 2021 (58%).
- 6 in 10 participants knew that all women & people with a cervix between the age of 25-65 yrs are eligible for cervical screening in 2023 (61%), up 9% since 2021 (52%).
- 78% in 2023 were aware that the purpose of screening is to diagnose cervical cancer, up from 74% in 2021.
- 89% were aware in 2023 that early detection of abnormal cells is a benefit of cervical screening up 13% since 2021.
- Knowledge of limitations relating to cancer developing between screenings decreased to 66% in 2023 from 73% in 2021.
- The screening barrier, a fear of finding something wrong, increased slightly by 4% (45% in 2021; 48% in 2023). However, embarrassing decreased by 5% from 39% in 2021 to 34% in 2023.
- Awareness of HPV screening grew from 49% in 2021 to 63% in 2023. Awareness of the 5 year screening frequency increased from 31% in 2021 to 50% in 2023.
- Increase in participants feeling positive about CC (74% in 2021; 78% in 2023) and 8 in 10 (78%) agreed that CC puts the interest of people first up from 66% in 2021).
- Attending on invitation also increased from 63% in 2021 to 68% in 2023.