

4 SAMPLE ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION CRITERIA

4.1 Acceptance criteria

The national sample acceptance policy was published in early 2017 and implemented from 1st September 2017. This was updated on 25th August 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cervical-screening-accepting-samples-in-laboratories>

By following the national guidance and rejecting samples that fail to meet the sample acceptance criteria, the laboratory will ensure that:

1. The correct test result is issued to the correct women who attends for cervical screening
2. There is a reduction in the time taken to issue cervical screening results

Cervical screening samples must satisfy minimum requirements and any errors that compromise the safety of the patient will result in the sample being rejected.

4.1.1 Essential specimen data requirements are:

- Patient's full name i.e. at least first name and surname (2 identifiers)
- Patient's date of birth
- NHS number
- Patient address
- Name & address of GP
- Name and address of sender
- Sample taker personal ID – GMC, NMC or PA number

In order to link the form to the sample vial, at least 4 legible matching patient identifiers must be given on both the form and the vial, see bullet points:

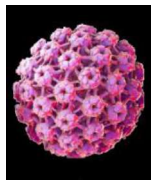
The **sample request** must contain the minimum identifying requirements:

- the patient's full name (at least first name and surname)
- 2 other identifiers
- the patient's date of birth
- their NHS number
- the patient's address
- the name and address of their GP
- the name and address of sample taker (sender)
- the sample taker personal ID number (PIN)

The **vial** must be labelled with four unique identifiers:

- the patient's full name (at least first name and surname)
- the patient's date of birth
- a fourth identifier (ideally the NHS number; the patient address is also acceptable)

All rejections are coded in the laboratory with the relevant error code. This provides the laboratory with a means of auditing rejected samples and providing feedback to the Screening and Immunisation Teams.



4.1.2 Minor discrepancies

Minor discrepancies will be accepted as the patient identity is known

1. Spelling error in patient name but the name sounds the same (homonyms)
2. Transposition of digits within the date of birth or NHS number
3. Specimen without form, or vice versa – contact the sample taker to seek an explanation
4. Request form without sender details – check CSMS and phone GP to confirm

4.1.3 Major discrepancies

Major discrepancies constitute a serious risk as the patient identity is uncertain and the sample must be rejected.

1. Absence of two or more essential data items
2. Mismatch between the vial and the form
3. Two or more minor discrepancies
4. Unlabelled vial

4.1.4 Rejection Categories Routine Samples

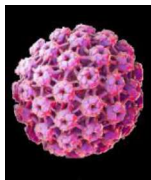
Error code	Reason for rejection
E1	Vial, no form
E2	Form, no vial
E3	Unlabelled vial
E4	Partially labelled vial
E5	Discrepant details on vial & form
E6	Insufficient patient ID on form
E7	Patient details differ from cytology/CSMS
E8	No Valid PIN provided
E9A	Vial leaked, no fluid
E9B	Incorrect sample container used
E10	Illegible patient details on form or vial
E11	Out of programme sample due to: A Under 24 ½ years B Early repeat C Vault sample taken in primary care D Post-radiotherapy treatment E Sample <3 months after pregnancy, termination, miscarriage, unsuccessful IVF, or IUD fitting.
E12	Out of date vial

- **Samples should not be repeated within 3 months of a previous sample**
- **Samples should not be taken more than 3 months prior to due date**

All out of programme samples will be rejected by the laboratory

A recent audit has shown that the most common reason for the laboratory to reject a sample is an 'out of programme' sample and in particular early repeat tests i.e. the sample has been taken before a patient has been invited for screening.

We encourage all sample takers to check that a patient is due for her routine test before taking the cervical sample.



4.1.5 Rejection Categories Self-Test Samples

Error code	Reason for rejection
S1	Self- test device received without sample transport bag/label
S2	Sample transport bag/label received without self-test device
S3	Self-test is unlabelled
S4	Patient details on sample transport bag/label and self-test device do not match (NB self-test device should not contain identifiers, however if details have been added by the participant, they should match the label)
S5	Self -test device is damaged
S6	Out of date self-test device
S7	Already had an LBC test in programme
S8	Sample received in the wrong device/container
S9	Sample received more than 14 days after being taken
S10	Other