

Colposcopy

Gynaecology

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- **Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available**
- **If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111**
- **Keep the environment clean and tidy**
- **Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.**

Introduction

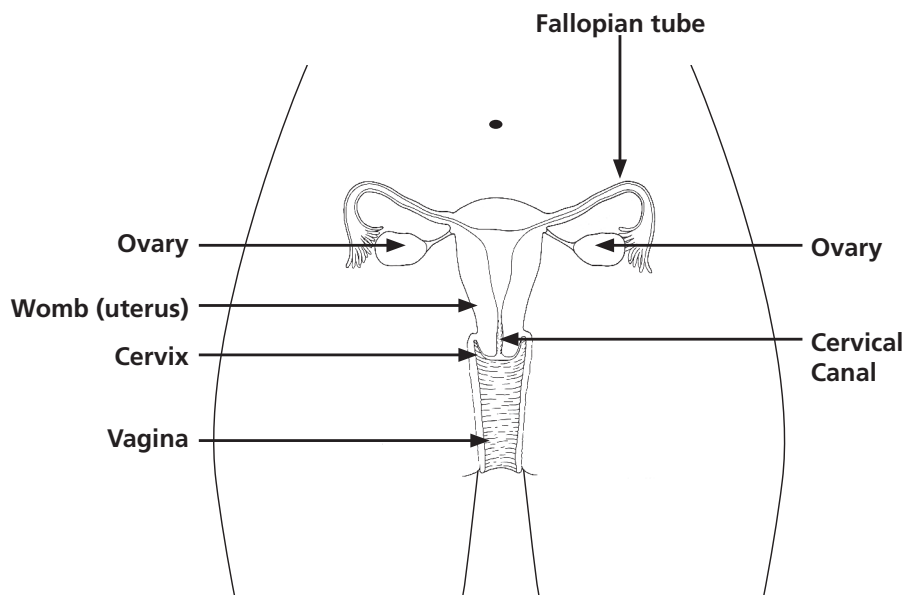
This leaflet has been designed to give you information about your forthcoming visit to the Colposcopy Clinic and the investigations and treatments possible at that visit.

Do not hesitate to speak to a member of the medical or nursing team should you have any additional questions not covered by this leaflet.

What is the NHS Cervical Screening Programme?

This programme was set up in 1988 to reduce the chances of women developing cervical cancer. It aims to screen all women between the ages of 25 and 64; you will be invited for cervical screening every 5 years from the age of 24.5 years unless you have had an abnormal result then you will be advised accordingly as to when you're next cervical screening sample is due.

The screening programme aims to pick up abnormal changes in the cells in the cervix long before they have a chance to become cancer. A colposcopy examination is the only way to check these changes and offers the benefit of quick and easy treatment, usually in the clinic. It is a very successful programme which research suggests saves at least 4,500 lives a year (taken from Cancer Research UK).



Why have I been referred for a colposcopy?

You have been asked to come for a further examination for one of the following reasons.

1. You have had three consecutive cervical screening samples (smears) that have showed high risk HPV (Human papilloma virus) detected with negative cytology (no abnormal cells)
2. Your recent cervical screening sample (smear) has found evidence of possible abnormal cells; the medical term for this is dyskaryosis

This is not unusual, about one in 20 cervical screening tests are reported as abnormal. Please try not to worry. The NHS Cervical Screening Programme aims to pick up these changes so that we can take action at an early stage.

The main cause of abnormal cells is a virus called the human papilloma virus (HPV), other factors especially smoking also increase the risk of cell abnormality.

There are many types of HPV and most women will become infected during their lifetime, but they generally clear without treatment for the majority.

Certain types of HPV (high risk types) can cause cell abnormalities that have the potential to develop into cervical cancer if left unmonitored and untreated.

Women with low risk HPV types do not require a colposcopy or treatment.

Teenagers, both boys and girls, around the age of 13-14 years are offered a vaccination against the nine types of HPV.

Consent

We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand. Your colposcopist will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives where relevant before they ask for your consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the procedure or treatment proposed please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

Are there any problems or risks with the treatment?

Problems are rare with this treatment, however, a small number of patients may suffer a pain in their pelvis or heavy bleeding from the treated area. This may happen immediately after treatment or within the next couple of weeks and may mean you have an infection, particularly if you have a temperature or strong-smelling discharge. It is very important that you contact your family doctor (GP) or the colposcopy clinic as you may need another examination or antibiotics.

Benefits section

The benefits of colposcopy are that it enables the clinician to closely examine the cervix to identify and manage any abnormalities found.

Are there any alternatives to Colposcopy?

There are currently no alternative procedures to closely examine the cervix once an abnormality has been found on a cervical screening sample (smear).

What would happen if I choose to not have the procedure?

If you choose to not to have the procedure then it is not possible to say whether any abnormalities are visible on your cervix., nor is it possible to comment on how these abnormalities will progress in the future.

What is dyskaryosis?

This is the term given to the abnormal changes that can act as an early warning that cervical cancer might develop in the future. It is important to remember that it is very rare indeed for these abnormal cells to be cancer.

For many women, their abnormal result will **show borderline changes or mild dyskaryosis as well as high risk HPV**. These are small, low-grade changes in the cells and will very often return to normal by themselves. It is best to keep an eye on the situation to see if this happens rather than having immediate treatment.

For some women, their result will show **moderate or severe dyskaryosis**. These changes are not cancer and in most cases do not lead to cancer in the future. However, the changes are less likely to return to normal by themselves and usually act as an early warning sign that cervical cancer may develop. This will require outpatient treatment that is virtually effective in 100% of cases.

Other signs or symptoms not related to having a cervical screening test.

You may not have been referred for a colposcopy because of a cervical screening test. However, you may have been experiencing signs or symptoms which may be related to the health of your cervix. The Colposcopy Clinic is the best place to have these symptoms checked.

What is a colposcopy?

Having a colposcopy is similar to having a cervical screening test. You will lie on a special couch that has supports for your legs. The colposcopist will warm and lubricate a speculum (a special instrument) and place it in your vagina (the same as when you had a cervical screening test). This will allow them to see your cervix. The colposcope (which, put simply, is binoculars on a stand) gives the colposcopist an enlarged 3-D view of the cervix. **The colposcope does not enter the vagina.**

The colposcopist will put a liquid onto the cervix with a cotton-wool ball; this may be cold and sometimes sting a little. This liquid highlights any abnormal cells and allows the colposcopist to make a diagnosis. If everything is normal, you may be allowed to go home straight away. However, the diagnosis may mean that it is necessary to take a **punch biopsy** or carry out **treatment**.

What is a punch biopsy?

A punch biopsy is a tiny piece of tissue taken from the cervix and sent to a pathologist so that it can be examined closely to see if there are changes in the cells. You will not normally need a local anaesthetic. The biopsy is about the size of a grain of rice. You may have a brown or red discharge from your vagina for the next few days after this. You may also feel discomfort like period pain for the next few hours. You should take your normal painkillers to ease this pain, but do not take more than the recommended dose.

Is there anything that I need to know before I have a colposcopy?

There is no need to avoid having sex before you have a colposcopy examination, unless you have a coil fitted

- You can eat and drink as normal before your appointment
- Bring a list of any medication you are taking and let the colposcopist know of any medical history or allergies
- Please also make a note of when you had your last period
- You will be asked to remove clothes below the waist. Because of this, you may find it more comfortable to wear a full skirt or dress, which you would not need to remove for the examination
- If you need treatment during your appointment, you may need to remove any jewellery you wear below the waist (such as belly button or vaginal piercings). It is important that you are aware of this so you can remove the jewellery before you come for your appointment
- After the examination, you may have some discharge from your vagina. Although we will provide pads, you are more than welcome to bring panty liners with you if you prefer
- You should be able to drive home afterwards but for car insurance purposes, you should ask your colposcopist whether you are fit to drive after your treatment. It may be wise to bring someone with you in case you do not feel well after your appointment
- If you have an coil (IUCD or IUS) in place then you are asked to use a barrier method of contraception in addition to the coil for at least seven days prior to your appointment in case treatment is required to the cervix and the coil needs to be removed

What will happen during my appointment?

When you arrive at the clinic, we will aim to see you as close to your appointment time as possible, but please be patient if there are delays that we could not have expected beforehand. You will then be called for your colposcopy, where you will meet the colposcopist (who may be a doctor or nurse) and the nurses who will be with you during the examination.

During your colposcopy appointment, the doctor or nurse will take down your medical history and explain the procedure to you. Following this, the colposcopist will carry out the examination.

How long will the appointment last?

How long your appointment will take depends on whether any procedures are necessary, but it is usually no longer than 20 minutes to half an hour.

What if I need treatment?

The aim of treatment is to destroy or remove abnormal cells and allow healthy cells to replace them. Most types of treatment can be done as an outpatient in the Colposcopy Clinic on your first appointment, so you may want to arrange a fairly quiet day in case you are offered this.

If you have a coil fitted, please use an extra form of contraception for seven days before your appointment, as sometimes it is necessary to remove the coil before you have the treatment.

What are the types of treatment?

Loop diathermy

The treatment at this clinic is usually loop diathermy. This treatment uses an electric current to remove abnormal tissue from your cervix. A local anaesthetic (similar to that you would have at the dentist) is used to numb the cervix, and the abnormal cells are then lifted off the cervix using a wire loop. The colposcopist may then apply mustard-coloured paste to seal the area. During the procedure, you will hear various noises from the machinery. The examination and treatment lasts roughly 15 minutes. Afterwards, you will be given a sanitary pad (or you may want to bring your own) and asked to rest for a short time before leaving.

What will the treatment show?

The technical term used to refer to cell changes confirmed by a biopsy or treatment is cervical intra-epithelial neoplasia, more commonly known as CIN.

To make distinctions between the various states of changes in the cells, doctors have developed an increasing scale from 1 to 3 according to how many of the cells are affected. So, treatment results will most commonly be CIN 1, CIN 2 or CIN 3. The results of this treatment will show what follow-up you will need.

What normally happens after treatment?

Most women will feel okay after treatment. In a very small number of cases, the following may happen.

- Some women feel dizzy or faint when they get up following the treatment. If this happens to you, the nurse will ask you to lie down and will keep you under close observation until you have fully recovered
- If you have a punch biopsy, you may experience discomfort like period pain for the next few hours. You should take your normal painkillers to ease the pain but not take more than the recommended dose
- It is normal to have some bloodstained discharge after treatment. If you have bloodstained discharge from the treatment, do not use tampons. Instead, use pads or panty liners. You should not use tampons until four weeks after the treatment to avoid infection. Do not worry if you do not have any discharge
- You should avoid heavy lifting or vigorous exercise for a day or so after treatment. You should also avoid swimming for at least two weeks or until the discharge has stopped because of the risk of infection
- We will send you a letter with your results. If you have not received this letter eight weeks after your appointment, please contact the clinic

Will I need to have check-ups?

Yes. It is important to keep your appointments to make sure that your cervix is healthy. Most Colposcopy Clinics recommend that you have a follow-up check either at six or twelve months after the examination or treatment, although this will depend on the results of your examination. The check-ups may be back at the Colposcopy Clinic or could be at your family doctor's (GP's) surgery or local clinic. We will discuss the exact details with you. It is very important to complete the follow-up programme as this allows us to check that your cervix stays healthy.

Frequently asked questions

What should I do if I have a period on the day of my colposcopy?

Phone the clinic (using contact details at the end of the leaflet) and check whether you should go ahead with your appointment, as this often depends on what your appointment is for. If you feel awkward about having an examination during your period, contact the clinic and change the time of your appointment.

Can I have sex in the week before I have a colposcopy?

You do not need to avoid having sex before you have a colposcopy, unless you have a coil fitted. If this is the case, please use an extra method of contraception for seven days before your appointment, as sometimes it is necessary to remove the coil before you have the treatment.

What happens if I am pregnant or think I might be?

It is important that you keep your colposcopy appointment. A colposcopy can be carried out quite safely during pregnancy, but any other investigations will usually be postponed until after the baby is born. When you come for your appointment, we can talk to you more about this.

Will having a colposcopy affect my fertility or sex life?

Having a colposcopy does not affect either of these. However, different treatments may have different effects and we will be happy to discuss this with you at your appointment. If you have any treatment, you will have to avoid having sex for four weeks afterwards. If you have a special event coming up (for example, you are getting married or going on holiday very soon after your appointment), please contact the clinic and we will discuss whether it is necessary to rearrange your appointment.

More information

If you have any more questions about your referral or treatment, phone our clinic on 01902 695157 (8.30am – 4.30pm).

You may also contact your family doctor and they will be happy to help you.

You can find more information on cervical screening on the National Cancer Screening website at:
www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical/index.html

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。