

## Fact sheet

# Colposcopy

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A colposcopy is a test which looks at the cervix (neck of the womb) using a magnifying instrument called a colposcope.

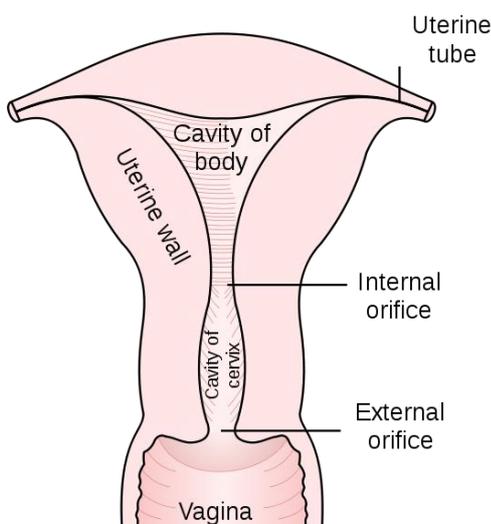
This test is done if you have:

- an abnormal Pap smear test that needs further assessment (checking)
- for abnormal bleeding from the cervix, particularly bleeding that happens after sex (post coital bleeding).

The colposcopy allows your doctor to see whether you have changes on your cervix and, if you do, whether they need further treatment or can just be managed with regular check-ups.

Most changes that show up on a Pap test are not cancer and many clear up by themselves. However, because they sometimes develop into cancer it is very important to have high grade changes checked and treated if necessary. [See abnormal Pap smear fact sheet]

### Cervix and Uterus



### **What is a colposcope?**

This is a magnifying instrument which looks like a telescope or binoculars on a stand which your doctor uses to look at the cervix. The colposcope does not touch you during the procedure.

### **What should I expect during the colposcopy?**

- Colposcopy is done in the outpatient clinic or in your gynaecologist's rooms. The procedure only takes 10 -15 minutes and you should be able to go home straight after the test.
- You will be given a hospital gown to change into, or a sheet to cover you from the waist down. Your legs will be placed in supports and you will be made as comfortable as possible.
- A speculum will be inserted (put) into the vagina in a similar way to having a Pap smear. This helps your doctor to see the cervix clearly.
- Depending on why you are having colposcopy, a repeat Pap smear may be taken from the cervix.
- The cervix is then cleaned with vinegar to show any abnormal areas; sometimes brown liquid called iodine is used to further identify (show) abnormal cells. Occasionally people are allergic to iodine; if you know that are allergic to iodine or fish please tell the staff. If iodine is used you may have a brownish discharge for a few days after procedure.
- You may be able to see the cervix on a television screen while the doctor works.

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**Please let the staff know if you would prefer not to watch the screen.**

- Usually a small sample of tissue (called a biopsy) is taken from any abnormal area found. The biopsy feels like a small pinch and you may experience mild crampy period-like pain for a short while.
- The biopsy tissue will be sent to a pathologist who will check it under a microscope.

**You should not have a period at the time of colposcopy as we can't see the cervix well if you are bleeding. Please try and plan your appointment for a time when you are not expecting to have a period. Contact the clinic to rebook your appointment if necessary.**



**Can I have a colposcopy if I am pregnant?**

Yes, it is important that you still attend for the colposcopy. The test can be done in pregnancy but a biopsy will not usually be taken.

**What should I expect after the colposcopy?**

You should be able to go home after your colposcopy. Very rarely patients feel slightly dizzy or nauseous. We will keep you in the clinic until you are feeling well before letting you go home. It is normal to have a small amount of spotting or slight vaginal discharge for a few days.

To protect yourself from infection, we advise that for a week after the test you:

- do not put use tampons or douches
- do not have sex
- avoid swimming or bathing (showering is fine).

You may feel mild crampy period pain for 24 hours after the test; taking ibuprofen or paracetamol will help with this.

It is extremely rare to have problems after a colposcopy however, please contact your doctor or the hospital clinic if you have:

- heavy or bad smelling vaginal discharge
- heavy bleeding (more than a period)
- severe pain
- fever (temperature).

**The results of your biopsy and repeat Pap test will usually take about 2 weeks to come through. Our staff will let you know how the results will be shared with you. Sometimes a phone call is all that is needed, while at other times we will want to you to come in so that the results and further management can be discussed with you in more detail.**

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After the results have been discussed, you may be advised to:

- return to your GP for further Pap tests
- return to the clinic for another colposcopy in several months
- require treatment for changes found on the biopsy.

This treatment could be in the form of:

- LLETZ
- Cone biopsy

These treatments will be discussed with you by your doctor and the clinic staff and further information sheets are available about the procedures.

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**

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