

Title: What Is Colposcopy?

What is the procedure that I am to have?

Colposcopy is a simple examination of the neck of the womb (cervix) that allows us to see abnormal changes that may be present more closely and assess whether any treatment is required. The colposcope is really just a magnifying glass which allows us to look more closely for abnormalities that may be present on the cervix.

Why do I need it?

You will probably have been referred to the Colposcopy Clinic because your smear test has shown that changes are taking place on your cervix. Abnormal smear tests are not unusual, in fact about one in every twenty smear tests are abnormal in some way. These abnormal changes are called '**dyskariosis**' and act as early warning sign so that we can diagnose and treat changes long before cervical cancer develops. The Human Papilloma Virus or '**HPV**' is the virus known to be the cause of such changes and may also be tested for with your smear test.

Not all changes require treatment and it is very rare for these changes to be cancer.

What benefits are there to having it?

The benefits of performing colposcopy are that we can assess the changes present on the cervix and diagnose the abnormality to decide whether treatment is required or merely monitor the changes by performing more regular smear tests, thus preventing cervical cancer occurring.

Are there any alternatives?

There are no alternatives to the colposcopy examination.

What risks are there?

During the procedure it may be necessary to obtain biopsies (tiny pieces of tissue about the size of a pinhead) this may cause a slight stinging or period type pain and some blood stained discharge from the vagina for a few days. To prevent infection and allow the area to heal you will be advised not to use tampons or have sex until it stops.

What side effects might there be?

You may experience slight period type pains that may persist after the procedure.

Do I need any preparation before I come for the procedure?

Please have something to eat before attending the clinic. You are welcome to arrange for a friend or relative to accompany you for support. You may wish to wear a skirt to avoid having to remove all your lower clothing. You may wish to bring some music i.e. a personal hi-fi/ipod as some patients find this relaxing. You may wish to bring your own sanitary towel with you to the appointment and suitable underwear. If you are on a period on the day of your appointment please ring before attending as it may be necessary to perform the procedure on another date.

What sort of anaesthetic will I have?

No anaesthetic is required for this procedure.

What will happen when I arrive for the procedure and who will I meet?

You will be greeted at the reception desk where a member of staff will confirm your details. You will be asked to be seated in our waiting room where you will be called through for your appointment by a member of staff working in the colposcopy clinic. The person performing the examination will introduce themselves, explain the procedure to you to ensure you are fully aware what to expect and ask a series of questions relating to your periods, contraception and your general health. You are welcome to ask any questions you have regarding the procedure. You will then be asked to undress from the waist down and then assisted on a special couch with supports on which to rest your legs.

Will I need to sign a consent form or give verbal consent?

You will be asked for verbal consent for the colposcopy examination

What does the procedure involve? How long does it last? What does it feel like?

The procedure takes approximately 15 minutes. When you are lying comfortably the colposcopist will insert a speculum into the vagina (an instrument used to gently stretch open the vagina) just like when having the smear test. This sometimes feels cold and a little uncomfortable. The colposcopist will position themselves at the foot of the couch and shine a light attached to the colposcope into the vagina. The colposcope looks like a pair of binoculars on a stand. It does not touch or go inside you. Sometimes swabs for the presence of infection are taken and it may be necessary to take a repeat smear, this is not usually painful. Special liquids are then dabbed on to the cervix with cotton wool to highlight the abnormal cells. The solution may give a 'tingling' sensation. The abnormal areas appear white. It is usually possible to watch the procedure on a monitor and sometimes a photograph of the cervix may be taken for future reference. If any abnormal areas are seen a small sample of the areas or 'biopsies' will be taken and then sent off to be checked more thoroughly in a laboratory. The results may take up to two weeks to be processed. They will show if you need any treatment

and is so what type is required. After the biopsy is taken a chemical stick may be used to stop the area bleeding. This may give you a slight period type pain. When the colposcopist has finished the procedure they will remove the speculum and ask you to get dressed. Sometimes treatment may be offered at your first visit. If so this will be discussed with you before the examination begins. Mostly treatment is performed at separate appointment and the procedures are very similar to the first colposcopy examination.

What happens after the procedure?

After you have dressed the colposcopist may be able to tell you whether any treatment is required but often if a biopsy or smear test has been taken you will need to wait for the results. This may take a few weeks. Often if only mild abnormalities are present they can return to normal by themselves. If this is the case you may be asked to attend the clinic for a repeat smear test six to twelve months after your colposcopy to monitor the changes to the cervix. If you require treatment you will be given information specific to the type of treatment you need and an appointment to have this performed.

How long will I need to stay in hospital?

Colposcopy is a simple procedure performed in Women's Health Care and rarely requires a hospital admission.

When I go home will I need someone with me or have any special equipment?

No, you will not require anyone with you. You may require a supply of panty liners or sanitary towels for a few days if you have had a biopsy taken.

Will I need any particular care at home? Do I need any follow up care and/or to see my GP?

No you do not require any particular care at home. We will inform you of any follow up care required when we have all your results. If you need to visit your GP for any reason we will inform you in writing.

What can go wrong once I'm home? Are there any signs I should look for and what should I do?

If you have any heavy bleeding following colposcopy then please contact Women's Health Care.

When can I start my normal activities again?

(e.g. driving, sport, work, sex etc)?

Following colposcopy it is only necessary to avoid having sexual intercourse and the use of tampons until the blood stained discharge has stopped. All other activities can be resumed.

Who can I contact if I have more questions?

If you have any questions or concerns the colposcopy administrator and nurse colposcopist are available in Women's Health Care Monday to Friday 830-5pm and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The contact number for the colposcopy office is 01204 390769. We have an answer machine facility should you wish to leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as someone is available.

Where can I find more information such as support groups and websites?

Further information can be obtained online at :-

NHS Cervical Screening Programme website

British Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology website

We recognise that not everyone will find this document easy to read. We can arrange for large print, audio tape versions and for summaries or explanations in other languages. Please call 01204 390391 if we can help.

IPG1290 v3

Review: 08/2017

Print number: WHC8