

Colposcopy department

What is colposcopy?

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

A colposcopy is usually carried out at the colposcopy clinic and involves a doctor or nurse specialist using a colposcope, which is a magnifying instrument to look at the neck of the womb and called the cervix.

Why do I need a colposcopy?

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

1) **The laboratory was unable to report on your last smear test**

This can happen because there were too few cells removed during the procedure. When this happens on two or more occasions, you are referred to colposcopy to check that your cervix is healthy.

2) **Your cervical screening test shows evidence of possible abnormal cells**

You have been asked to come to the colposcopy clinic for further examination because your smear test has shown abnormal changes in the cells of your cervix. These abnormal changes are known as dyskaryosis.

For many women, their abnormal result will show borderline changes or mild dyskaryosis along with a positive HPV screen. These changes are known as low grade changes will very often return to normal by themselves. We often monitor these changes rather than giving an immediate treatment.

For a few women their result will show moderate or severe dyskaryosis. These changes do not mean you have cancer. However, the cells in your cervix are less likely to return to normal and these changes can act as an 'early warning' signs that if left untreated, cervical cancer may develop.

3) **Other reasons**

You may be referred to the colposcopy clinic because you have unusual vaginal bleeding, such as bleeding between your periods or after sexual intercourse. Or, while having your smear taken, your GP/practice nurse may have noticed an area on your cervix that looks irregular.

What happens during the examination?

- You will meet the colposcopist (doctor or specialist nurse) who will examine you. You will be asked to remove your clothing from the waist down. A gown will be provided.
- You will be asked to lie on a couch with your legs apart, just in the same position as when you had your smear test.
- The colposcopist will look carefully at your cervix and apply two solutions to the cervix that help highlight any abnormal cells. A very small biopsy (a piece of tissue) may be taken, which some women do not feel at all, while others feel it as a small pinch. This will be sent to the laboratory for further examination.
- It would be advisable to wear a panty liner afterwards as you may have a brown discharge from one of the solutions (iodine) used or bleeding from the biopsy. **Do not** use tampons. The examination takes about ten minutes.

If you are going to be on your period on the day of your appointment, please contact the colposcopy office as you may need to re-schedule (see number below).

Does the colposcope go inside me?

No. The magnifying instrument and its light do not enter your body. However, the colposcopist will examine you internally and a speculum (the same instrument used to take your smear) will be used to get a clear view of the cervix.

After your colposcopy

After your colposcopy you can usually return to work or carry on with your normal day. You may be advised to avoid sexual intercourse and use of tampons if a biopsy is taken.

What treatments are available?

The results from the examination and biopsy will show if you need any treatment. The colposcopist will discuss this with you, not everyone who has a colposcopy needs further treatment.

The aim of treatment is to remove all of the abnormal cells on your cervix. The treatment is usually done in the outpatient clinic with a local anaesthetic. However, some patients may need a general anaesthetic which may require an overnight stay.

The treatment is performed in one of two ways using either a loop or needle diathermy, where the abnormal cells are removed using a heated wire loop or needle.

How do I receive my results and my next appointment?

Details of your results and next appointment date (if required) will be sent to you and your GP by post. This normally takes between two and six weeks.

If you have any questions or need to change your appointment

If you have any questions or need to change your appointment you can contact us on the numbers below:

St Mary's Hospital,
Colposcopy department,
Winston Churchill Wing,
Praed Street, London W2 1NY
Direct line: **020 3312 1289**

Appointment line: **020 3312 3326**
Nurse Specialists: **020 3312 1365**
Email: colposcopyadvice.imperial@nhs.net

Other source of information

British Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology
www.bsccp.org.uk

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk