

Gynaecology: Colposcopy

Attending Colposcopy

Introduction: the NHS Cervical Screening Programme (NHSCSP)

This programme was set up in 1988 to reduce the incidence of cervical cancer. It aims to screen all women between the ages of 25-64 years on either a three yearly or five yearly basis. Between the ages of 25-49 you will be screened three yearly and between the ages of 50-64, five yearly.

The screening programme aims to pick up abnormal cell changes in the cervix **long before** they have chance to become cancer and the introduction of HPV testing will help to do this more effectively.

Why have I been referred to colposcopy?

You have been invited to attend colposcopy for a detailed examination of your cervix for one of the following reasons:

- Your GP and or Consultant have requested a detailed examination of your cervix
- Your cervical screening sample has shown evidence of high risk HPV and cell abnormalities. For many women, their abnormal result will show low grade cell changes. These low grade changes in the cells will often return to normal by themselves;

Please try not to worry. It is the aim of the NHS Cervical Screening programme to pick up these changes so that action can be taken at an early stage.

What is HPV?

HPV stands for Human Papilloma Virus. It is a very common infection and most women get it at some time in their life.



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In most cases it clears up by itself without the need for treatment.

There are many types of HPV. Most are harmless but some cause abnormalities of the cervix and are known as 'high risk' HPV types. These abnormalities often clear up without treatment when the virus clears. But in some women the virus persists, placing them at greater risk of developing cervical abnormalities (CIN) which may need 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, these changes are less likely to return to normal by themselves and usually act as an early warning that, over time, cervical cancer may develop. Therefore, it would be advisable to have simple out-patient treatment that is virtually 100% effective in most cases.

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

You may not have been referred to 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 investigate these symptoms.

Is there anything that I need to know before I attend?

- There is no need to avoid sexual intercourse prior to a colposcopy, unless there is a coil present;
- You are able to eat and drink normally prior to a colposcopy;
- Bring a list of medication you are taking and let the colposcopist know of any medical history or allergies;
- Please make a note of your last period;
- You will be asked to remove clothes from below the waist therefore you may find it more comfortable to wear a skirt for the examination;
- If treatment is required it may be necessary to remove any jewellery from the waist down. It is therefore important that you are aware of this as you may wish to remove any naval or vaginal piercing before your attendance;
- After the examination you may have some vaginal discharge and although pads are provided you are more than welcome to bring panty liners with you if you prefer;

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- It may be advisable to bring someone with you if you are having treatment, to drive you home afterwards.

What will happen during my appointment?

On arrival at the clinic you will be asked to take a seat in the waiting room. We will aim to see you as near to your appointment as possible, but please bear with us if there is a delay due to unforeseen circumstances. You will be called for and greeted by your colposcopist who may be a doctor or nurse; there will also be another nurse present in the examination room who will help make you comfortable.

During your colposcopy appointment a medical history is taken and the procedure explained. Following this the nurse will direct you into the colposcopy examination room and assist you on to the couch.

The length of time of your appointment is dependant on whether any other procedures are necessary but it usually no longer than 20-30 minutes.

What is Colposcopy?

Having a colposcopy is similar to having a cervical smear test. You will lie on a special couch that has supports for your legs. A speculum will be placed in your vagina (the same as for your smear test) which enables the colposcopist to see your cervix.

The colposcope which, put simply, is binoculars on a stand, gives the colposcopist an enlarged 3D view of your cervix, which you will also be able to see if you wish. The colposcope does not enter the vagina.

A liquid is put on to the cervix with a cotton wool ball; this may be a little cold and sometimes stings a little. This liquid highlights any abnormal cells and allows the colposcopist to make a diagnosis. If everything is normal you may well not have anything done. However, the colposcopist may wish to take a small **punch biopsy** or carry out a **treatment**.

What is a punch Biopsy?

A punch biopsy is a tiny piece of tissue (size of a rice grain) taken from the cervix and sent to the pathology department so it can be examined

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closely to see if there are any changes in the cells. Local anaesthetic is not normally needed and the biopsy can be taken with very little discomfort. You may have a red/brown discharge for a couple of days following this. The nurses will give you more detailed information to take home if this procedure is performed.

What if I need treatment?

The aim of the treatment is to destroy or remove abnormal cells. Most treatments (loop diathermy) can be performed in the colposcopy clinic on your first appointment and will be discussed with you by the colposcopist before examination.

If your smear has been reported as **moderate or severe dyskaryosis** you will also receive information about the treatment with your appointment.

If you have a coil please use an additional method of contraception for 7 days before your appointment as it is sometimes necessary to remove your coil prior to treatment.

What will the biopsy 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**.

In order to make distinctions between the various states of changes in the cells, doctors have developed an increasing scale from 1-3 according to how many of the cells are affected. Therefore treatment results will most commonly be CIN 1, CIN 2 or CIN 3.

Practical Questions

Where do I come for my appointment? (University Hospital, Coventry)

The Colposcopy Department is **on Ward 23** which is on the second floor of University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire (UHCW, Walsgrave). Enter the hospital through the large glass rotating doors at the main entrance and ward 23 is on the left, on the second floor (either take a lift or the stairs which are on the left near Pharmacy). Or ask at Reception.

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Please give yourself plenty of time to park. Parking charges do apply. Details can be found on our website: www.uhcw.nhs.uk.

Where do I come for my appointment? (Hospital of St Cross, Rugby)

If your appointment is at the Hospital of St Cross it will be within **the Owen Building**, which is near to the canteen.

We cannot always offer all ladies appointments within the Hospital of St Cross. This is because we need to see you usually within 1 month of the smear being reported and there are fewer appointments at the Hospital of St Cross than at University Hospital, Coventry.

If you have an appointment for University Hospital and you do not have transport from Rugby, please phone the Colposcopy Department on 024 7696 7222 and we will change the location for you.

What should I do if I have a period near the time of my colposcopy appointment?

If this is your first appointment you should still attend, however if you feel awkward about having an examination during your period do contact the clinic and we will change the date.

May I have sexual intercourse the week before my appointment?

There is no need to avoid intercourse prior to your colposcopy appointment unless you have a coil in place. In this instance it is necessary to use additional protection such as a condom for the 7 days before your appointment.

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

It is still important that you keep your colposcopy appointment. Colposcopy can be undertaken quite safely during pregnancy, but any investigations will be postponed until after you have had the baby. When you attend we will explain this in more detail.

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What happens if I cannot attend or miss my appointment?

It is always wise to attend your appointment, we understand how anxious you may be, but by not attending the worries may only increase for you.

We do try to make this appointment as easy as possible for you and we are willing to change your appointment to another time and day that suits you.

We have clinics (at University Hospital) nearly every day and can usually meet your requirements.

If you genuinely missed your appointment we will send you another time and date, usually within four weeks.

The Colposcopy Clinics at University Hospital are on:

Monday	9.00am – 12.00pm	and	2.00pm – 4.30pm
Tuesday	9.00am - 12.00pm	and	2.00pm - 4.30pm
Wednesday	9.00am – 12.00pm	and	2.00pm - 4.30pm
Friday	9.00am – 12.00pm		

The Colposcopy Clinic at St Cross Hospital, Rugby is on:

Alternate Tuesdays:	9.00 -12.00pm
Alternate Wednesdays:	9.00 -12.00pm

If you wish to change your appointment, regardless of which hospital your colposcopy is booked at, please phone: 024 7696 7222. If the receptionist is not available please leave your details and we will get back in touch as soon as we are able.

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Further Information

I hope this leaflet will answer some of your questions. If you have any concerns about any part of your condition or treatment please do not hesitate to phone **Lynn Connor (Nurse Colposcopist) on 024 7696 7222.**

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 7222 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

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