

Your visit to the colposcopy unit

Why do I need a Colposcopy?

You have been referred to the Colposcopy Unit because your last screening showed up some cells that did not look normal – the HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) also has been detected.

There may be several reasons for this. It is a common problem (one in twelve women have an abnormal result) and is very rare for these abnormalities to be a cancer.

These abnormalities are skin cells on the cervix which have not fully matured and sometimes, they will just return to normal on their own.

In most cases, however, they will be cured after some simple outpatient treatment.

What is HPV (Human Papilloma Virus)?

It is a very common infection among people who have been sexually active at some time in their life. It is easily transmitted during sex between men and women and between partners of the same sex.

What happens when I attend the unit?

You are very welcome to bring someone along with you for support.

You will be examined by the clinician and treatment may be offered at the same consultation if necessary.

Before any examination takes place you will have a consultation with a specialist doctor or nurse and this will also be an opportunity for you to ask any questions.

What happens during the examination?

During your colposcopy visit you will have two nurses to assist and support you.

A Colposcopy is a special method of looking at the cervix (the neck of the womb) with a microscope. Having had cervical screening, you will already be familiar with the instrument (speculum) used to see the cervix properly.

During the examination the cells of your cervix will be stained with a special solution which makes them show up more clearly, revealing any abnormal cells.

Depending on what is seen, a small sample of tissue may be removed and sent for tests before any treatment, or you may be offered treatment on the day.

This examination along with previous test results helps the clinician to decide the most appropriate treatment for you.

Images are displayed on a monitor beside the couch and if you wish you can look at the monitor as well.

Punch biopsy

The clinician may want to take a very small sample of tissue (biopsy) which is then sent to the laboratory for further assessment.

If you have had a punch biopsy you may have some light discharge for a few days afterwards.

We will inform you of the results of the biopsy within 4-6 weeks. The doctor will write to you with these results and a further appointment will be included for either further treatment (a loop excision) in approximately 4 weeks or a follow up cytology (smear) test in a year.

Loop excision

This is a method of removing the area of abnormality identified during the examination.

A local anaesthetic will be inserted to the cervix this will numb the area so that you do not feel any pain during the treatment. After a few minutes, once the anaesthetic has become effective, a very fine wire loop is used to remove the abnormal cells.

The treatment is usually very quick and painless. Afterwards you may feel slightly lightheaded or emotional. We encourage you to sit and rest for ten minutes in our waiting area. After this, you should feel perfectly all right to go home, although you may prefer not to drive. We recommend you don't return to work the day of the treatment.

How can I manage my discharge after my treatment?

It is normal to bleed after treatment to the cervix, although some women may not. The slight bleeding may last only a few days. Often this discharge can be brown in colour and watery. This may continue for approximately 2-4 weeks.

You should use sanitary towels after any treatment to the cervix and for your first period after the biopsy not tampons.

We also advise that you do not have sexual intercourse for up to four weeks or until the bleeding/discharge has stopped. Even if you have had no bleeding, you should still avoid sexual intercourse for two weeks.

It is advisable to avoid any strenuous, high impact exercise for at least a week or longer if you are still bleeding. It is also advisable to avoid swimming for 2 weeks or longer if you are still bleeding.

Every woman who has undergone treatment will need to have cervical screening (smear test) in 6 months. This will be checking for any abnormal cells and the HPV virus. Over these six months your cervix would have had time to heal completely.

The treatment should not affect your chances of becoming pregnant in the future.

In some circumstances treatment may affect the management of future pregnancies, please discuss with your clinician.

Please be aware that if you are planning an overseas holiday because this may not be covered by travel insurance.

What should I do if I have any concerns?

Even with this kind of relatively minor surgical procedure, there is a slight risk of infection.

If you have problems such as increased bleeding, offensive vaginal discharge, bad pains, high temperature or generally feeling unwell please contact your GP.

If you are unable to contact your GP, you may ring the Colposcopy Unit for advice on the telephone number at the end of this leaflet.

Smoking increases the risk of problems because it affects the body's ability to fight infection.

If I have any questions?

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. If it has not answered all of your questions please do not hesitate to call the

Colposcopy Units on:

RSCH 01273 664453

PRH 01444 448730

Further information can be found on:

www.jostrust.org.uk

www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk

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