

The Cervix

This organ is below the uterus and connects the uterus to the vagina. The opening of the cervix can be seen inside the vagina.

The cervix is made up of different types of cells. The types of cells change between the area of the cervix seen inside the vagina, and further up the canal of the cervix, which cannot be seen. These cells form a protective, skin-like covering.

When all the cells of the cervix are normal, your Pap test results should be normal.

Colposcopy

Colposcopy

This is an exam used by gynecologists to evaluate women with an abnormal Pap smear or other abnormality concerning the cervix (opening to the womb), vagina or vulva. The purpose is to look with a colposcope at high magnification to see the severity of the abnormality.

During the exam, your gynecologist may apply different solutions on the areas that may have abnormalities, allowing the changes in these tissues to be seen. The changes that cause an abnormal Pap test are often caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

The Appointment:

- the exam takes 15 to 20 minutes
- ideally colposcopy is done on a day not during a menstrual period. Please call the gynecologist's office if you will be on your period when you are scheduled for colposcopy
- it is important to eat breakfast or lunch before coming for a colposcopy appointment.

The Examination

The colposcope is a microscope mounted on a stand. It has a bright light that shines directly on the tissue to be examined. The view of the tissue is magnified between 9 and 40 times.

If the abnormalities are inside the body (in the vagina or on the cervix), a speculum (the instrument that is inserted into the vagina when a Pap smear is taken) is placed in the vagina. The colposcope **does not** enter the vagina.

Solutions may be applied to the areas that are to be examined. Small pinches of tissue (biopsies) may be taken for microscopic review and diagnosis in the laboratory.

Most women who need a colposcopy do not have cancer. They may, however, have abnormalities that **could become cancer**, if left untreated. These abnormalities have various names: dysplasia, CIN (cervical intraepithelial neoplasia), and CIS (carcinoma-in-situ). There are different severities of each condition.

What to Expect

- The exam may cause minimal to mild discomfort, similar to a Pap smear.
- If biopsies are taken, there may be bleeding or spotting for 1 to 3 days and mild abdominal cramping.

Treatment and Follow-Up

The colposcopy, along with biopsies, allows your gynecologist to diagnose the type of abnormality, judge how serious it is and understand how extensive it is so the most appropriate treatment (if any) can be planned.

Your gynecologist discusses the possible treatment options and may report to your health care provider. Some types of treatment include Loop Electrical Excision Procedure (LEEP), Cryotherapy, cone biopsy or Laser treatment. Sometimes, treatment is done using freezing only to the affected area. Other times, an IV and conscious sedation may be used.

Sometimes, treatment is not needed. Instead, repeat colposcopies may be required to monitor the changes that are occurring in the cervix or other affected tissues.