

# Colposcopy

## What you need to know

This information is for people referred to colposcopy (kol-poss-kapee). Usually this is because of an abnormal cervical screening test, but it could also be because your health provider recommends your cervix is checked.

Colposcopy at a public hospital is free if you are eligible to receive public health services in New Zealand. You can also arrange to be seen at a private clinic.

### What is a colposcopy?

During a colposcopy a specialist examines the cells in your cervix using a microscope called a colposcope.

It's important to go to your appointment even if you don't have any symptoms.

**Colposcopy is safe and effective.**

### Before your appointment

The actual colposcopy only takes about 15 minutes, but you will probably be at the clinic about an hour.

You are welcome to bring someone to support you, such as your partner, a family or whānau member, or friend.

When you confirm your appointment, let them know if you have any special needs, for example if you're pregnant.

It is safe to have a colposcopy when you are pregnant. However, it is unlikely a biopsy (tissue sample) or treatment will be recommended during this time.

If you have to change your appointment – such as your period is due on the day of your appointment – please ask to change it as soon as possible.

### Having a colposcopy

- First, the specialist nurse or doctor asks some questions about your health.
- Your specialist will explain the procedure and what to expect. This is a good time to ask any questions about the test.

- They will check the date of your last period for reference. You then lie comfortably on a bed, using leg rests so the specialist can get a clear view of your cervix through the colposcope. The scope won't touch you during the test.
- Your specialist uses a speculum (like the one used when you had your cervical screening test) to make examining your cervix easier.
- Liquid is painted onto the surface of your cervix to make the cells show up better.
- Together you discuss what they've found. They might even be able to show you on screen, if you're interested.
- Some small tissue samples may be taken (a biopsy).
- When the sample is taken you may feel a cramp, but it only takes a second.
- Your biopsy is sent to the laboratory for testing.
- Very occasionally, your colposcopy may have to be repeated because your biopsy results weren't conclusive.
- If your result means you need some form of treatment, the treatment options will be discussed with you.
- Your colposcopy results are stored with your cervical screening results in the National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP) Register.

**Early treatment has a 95% success rate**

## After your colposcopy

After the colposcopy you might feel some cramping, like period pains. You can treat this like normal period pain.

If you had a biopsy, you may also get some bleeding or reddish discharge from your vagina, which may last a few days. This is normal and should stop within a week. If it lasts longer than a week, call your colposcopy clinic straight away.

Until the bleeding stops, do the following to help your cervix heal:

- Use sanitary pads, not tampons
- Have showers instead of baths
- Don't have sex
- Don't use spa pools and swimming pools. If you start to bleed more than when you have your period, or if the bleeding goes on for more than a week, phone the clinic for advice.

## Getting your results

Your biopsy sample is sent to a laboratory to find out exactly what sort of changes are happening in your cervix. It takes up to four weeks for the clinic to get your biopsy results. The clinic may send your results to you or phone you. Phone the clinic if you have not received a letter or phone call after four weeks.

Your results will also be sent to the NCSP Register as well as your health provider.

The results of a biopsy may show there is nothing wrong with the cells in your cervix or there is something abnormal in the cells. Sometimes you may need another colposcopy if your biopsy results are not clear.

There are four main types of abnormal cell results:

1. Mild changes, also known as low-grade changes
2. Moderate to severe changes, also known as high-grade changes
3. Glandular cell changes
4. Changes suggestive of cervical cancer.

You can be reassured that most cell changes are not cancer, but it is important that changes are treated early to prevent cancer developing.

## The National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP)

The aim of the Programme is to reduce the number of people who develop cervical cancer.

When you have a cervical screening or colposcopy test you are enrolled in the Programme unless you choose not to be. You can withdraw at any time by filling in a form or by writing to the Programme. You can re-join at any time.

## What information is collected or used?

The information collected by the Programme is stored on a computer system called the NCSP Register which is managed by the Ministry of Health. De-identified laboratory specimens or results may be used for quality or teaching purposes.

For further information, call 0800 729 729.

## Further information

If you have specific questions about your appointment contact the colposcopy clinic or your health provider.

For further information on cervical screening:

- contact the National Cervical Screening Programme on 0800 729 729
- visit our website at [www.timetoscreen.nz](http://www.timetoscreen.nz)
- visit the health education website at [www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz)
- contact the National Screening Unit at the Ministry of Health, on [screening@health.govt.nz](mailto:screening@health.govt.nz).

