

COLPOSCOPY



What you need to know



National
Cervical
Screening
Programme



Kia ora and welcome

This information is for people referred to colposcopy (kol-poss-kapee). This is usually because a cervical screening test has suggested there could be some changes to the cells on your cervix. It could also be because your health provider recommends your cervix is checked.

You will get a letter from the colposcopy clinic to arrange an appointment. The procedure is free.



What is a colposcopy?

During colposcopy a specialist uses a microscope to view and check the cells on your cervix. The colposcope looks like a pair of binoculars on a stand. It magnifies the cervix so that the cell changes can be seen.

The examination may include taking a small sample of tissue (a biopsy). The biopsy takes only a couple of seconds and may be a bit uncomfortable.

Colposcopy is safe and effective.

It is important to attend your colposcopy appointment, even if you don't have any symptoms or you are pregnant.



Before your appointment

Your appointment may take up to an hour, although the actual colposcopy only takes about 15 minutes.

If you need to change your appointment for any reason, for example, if you think you might have your period on the day of your appointment, please phone the clinic as soon as possible.

If you need an interpreter, please let the clinic know.

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

If you have any questions about your appointment, please contact the clinic.

If it is difficult for you to attend the appointment, for example, because of transport or childcare, contact the colposcopy clinic as support options may be available.

If you have a disability that makes it difficult or uncomfortable to have the procedure, let the clinic know.

Please tell the clinic if you are pregnant. It is safe to have a colposcopy when you are pregnant. However, it is unlikely a biopsy or treatment will be recommended during pregnancy.

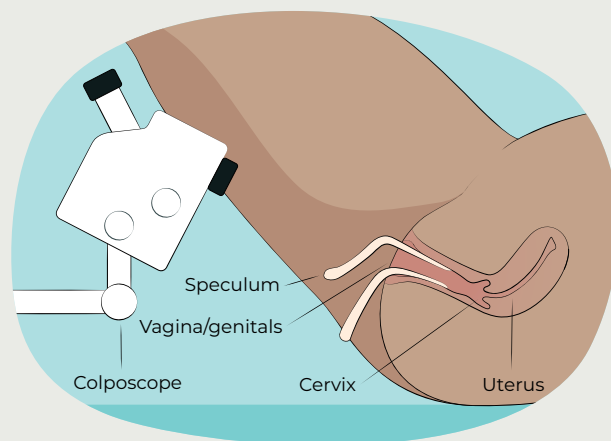
**Ma te mōhio e piki ai te hauora
me te waiora.
Knowledge improves health
and wellbeing.**

During your colposcopy

A specialist doctor or nurse carries out the examination and a nurse will also be there to help you. If you have any questions, ask the nurse or specialist.

You will be asked to lie on a bed with your legs placed in leg rests. A microscope will be put near your vagina/genitals. It will not touch your body. The specialist will gently place a speculum into the vagina/genitals. This makes it possible to clearly see a magnified view of the cervix through the microscope.

The colposcopist applies liquid onto your cervix to show up any cell changes. Some people find this stings a little. Small tissue samples may be taken of cells in areas where the changes are noted. This is called taking a biopsy. When the biopsy is taken, you may feel a quick, sharp pinch.



After your colposcopy

At the clinic, the specialist will talk to you about what they saw during your colposcopy.

For a few days after the procedure, you may have some pain, similar to period pain. Rest and do what you usually do when you have period pain.

If you had a biopsy, you may also bleed a little or have some reddish-brown discharge from your vagina/genitals. This is normal and should stop within a week.

Until the bleeding stops, and your cervix is healed, please:

- use sanitary pads, period underwear, NOT tampons or period cups
- have showers instead of baths
- do not use spa pools and swimming pools
- do not have sex, or place anything into the vagina/genitals.

If you start to bleed more than when you have your period, or if the bleeding goes on for more than a week, please phone the clinic for advice.

The colposcopy clinic will provide a letter with information about what to do to address any concerns you may have, especially outside clinic hours.

Getting your results

If you've had a biopsy, your sample will be sent to the laboratory to find out exactly what sort of changes are happening on your cervix. It can take up to 4 weeks for the clinic to get your biopsy results. If you have not heard from the clinic within 4 weeks, please contact them.

Your results will also be sent to the National Cervical Screening Programme as well as your health provider.

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

There are four main types of cell change 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 (including adenocarcinoma-in-situ).
4. Changes suggestive of cervical cancer.

Most cell changes are not cancer, but it is important to check so changes can be treated early to prevent cancer developing.



Treatment

Sometimes a follow-up cervical screening test or colposcopy is recommended instead of treatment.

The specialist will advise if you need treatment for any cell changes. The type recommended will depend on:

- the type of cells
- where they are on your cervix
- the size of the area with cell changes.

The specialist will discuss the treatment options with you.



Cervical cancer and HPV

Almost all cervical cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is spread by intimate skin-to-skin contact and any sexual activity. It affects almost all people at some point in their lives.

There are many types of HPV, most of which are not cancer-causing and are of no concern. HPV will usually clear up by itself. Only some types of the virus will cause cell changes that could lead to cancer.

Cervical cancer usually takes 10 years or more to develop. Regular cervical screening during this time means cell changes can be found and treated early to stop them from becoming cancer.

With cervical screening, HPV will be tested for first and for most people they can do it themselves using a swab to collect an internal sample from their vagina/genitals.

HPV screening is a better first screening test that will prevent more cancer.



The National Cervical Screening Programme

The aim of the National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP) is to reduce the number of people who develop cervical cancer.

When you have a cervical screening test you become enrolled, unless you choose not to be. You can choose to withdraw from the NCSP at any time, or you can remain on the Register but opt out of receiving any communications. You can contact the Programme about either of these options and if you decide to withdraw, we will send you a form to complete. You can also find the form on our website.

For further information about enrolment in the National Cervical Screening Programme, call **0800 729 729**.

What causes cell changes?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cell changes and cervical cancer. You can find more information about HPV at **TimeToCervicalScreen.nz** or in the brochures on **HealthEd.govt.nz**

- *Cervical Screening: What you need to know, code HE1192*
- *Cervical Screening: Understanding test results, code HE1193*

Early treatment of cell changes is usually successful at **stopping** these cells developing into **cervical cancer**.



More information

If you have questions about the information in this brochure:

- visit our website at **TimeToCervicalScreen.nz**
- contact the National Cervical Screening Programme on **0800 729 729**
- visit the health education website at **HealthEd.govt.nz**

For more information and to make sure your contact details are up-to-date, talk to your healthcare provider or the NCSP-Register. Freephone **0800 729 729** or email **info@ncspregister.health.nz**

You can look at the privacy section on the Time to Screen website for full details about how information collected by the Programme is securely managed.

TimeToCervicalScreen.nz



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Cervical
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Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Te Aka Whai Ora
Māori Health Authority