

Overview

Colposcopy

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Colposcopy is an examination to look at your cervix. Your cervix is the opening to your womb from your vagina.

A colposcopy examination helps a specialist doctor or nurse (colposcopist) to confirm if cells in your cervix are abnormal. It also helps them decide if you need treatment to remove the cells.

The cells can go back to being normal by themselves. But sometimes there's a risk they could turn into cervical cancer if you do not have treatment.

Removing these abnormal cells (sometimes called pre-cancerous cells) means they will not be able to turn into cancer.

When you might need colposcopy

You may need colposcopy if:

- you have had 2 or more positive tests in a row for [human papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#)
- a [cervical screening test \(smear test\)](#) finds that you have abnormal cells in your cervix
- the GP or nurse who did the screening test thought your cervix did not look as healthy as it should
- it was not possible to give you a [normal \(negative\) result after several screening tests](#)
- you have [symptoms of cervical cancer](#) and your GP refers you for a colposcopy

Try not to worry if you are told you will need to have a colposcopy examination. It's very unlikely you have cancer.

It's important that you attend your colposcopy appointment, even if you are pregnant.

Colposcopy and cervical screening

Colposcopy is free through the [CervicalCheck screening programme](#).

Your cervical screening test result will go to you and your GP. CervicalCheck may tell your GP to refer you to a colposcopy clinic. Your GP must do this within 10 days of getting your cervical screening results.

Your colposcopy appointment

Your GP or nurse will contact a colposcopy clinic and ask them to make an appointment for you.

There are [15 colposcopy clinics in Ireland](#) that CervicalCheck use. They are all in hospitals (in the outpatient department).

The colposcopy clinic will send you a letter with your appointment details.

If you cannot attend, let the colposcopy clinic know. They will give you a new appointment.

Your colposcopy takes about 15 to 20 minutes. It is a day procedure. You can go home the same day. It is ok to drive afterwards.

[Preparing for a colposcopy](#)

If you are pregnant

A colposcopy examination is safe during pregnancy.

If you need to have treatment, this will usually be delayed until a few months after giving birth.

[Having treatment for abnormal cervical cells if you're pregnant](#)

Results

It's often possible to tell right away if there are any abnormal (pre-cancerous) cells in your cervix. The colposcopist can judge from the screening test result and how your cervix looks.

A small sample of cells may be taken from your cervix for testing in a lab. This is called a biopsy. You will get your biopsy results a few weeks later. The biopsy confirms if the cells are pre-cancerous.

Read more about [colposcopy results](#).

Treatment

If it's clear that you have abnormal cells, you may have treatment to remove the cells at the same time as your examination. You will usually have treatment if there's a moderate or high chance of the cells becoming cancerous.

There are several simple ways to remove the abnormal cells. Sometimes this can be done at the same time as the colposcopy.

Read more about [colposcopy treatments](#).

Having colposcopy as a private patient

You may be referred privately for colposcopy by your GP. You may have to pay a fee.

CervicalCheck will not be able to access your results and information if you have a colposcopy that is not done through the screening programme. It only has access to results and recommendations for tests taken with CervicalCheck.

The average waiting times for colposcopy is 4 to 8 weeks for a colposcopy through CervicalCheck or as a private patient. If the case is urgent you will be seen within 2 weeks.

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