



Important information about your colposcopy



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

CervicalCheck
AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CEIRBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME

Important information about colposcopy

A colposcopy is a simple procedure used to look at the cervix, the opening to the womb from the vagina.

It may be done if a cervical screening test (previously known as a smear test) finds that you have abnormal cells in your cervix.

These cell changes often go away on their own but sometimes there's a risk they could turn into cervical cancer if you do not have treatment.

A colposcopy can help your doctor or nurse confirm if the cells in your cervix are abnormal. It also helps them to decide if you need treatment to remove the cells.

If it's clear that you have abnormal cells, you may have treatment to remove the cells at the same time as your examination.

If it's not clear if you have abnormal cells, a biopsy sample may be taken and sent to a lab. You'll need to wait until you get your biopsy results to have treatment.

A colposcopy is free of charge if you are referred through the CervicalCheck screening programme.

When might a colposcopy be needed?

You may be referred for a colposcopy after getting your screening test results if:

- some of the cells in your screening test sample are abnormal
- you have had 2 or more positive tests (HPV found) in a row for a HPV infection
- the GP (doctor) or nurse who carried out the screening test thought your cervix didn't look as healthy as it should
- it wasn't possible to give you a normal (negative) result after several screening tests

Getting a colposcopy appointment

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

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

If you can't attend, please let the colposcopy clinic know and they will reschedule your appointment.

There are 15 colposcopy clinics in Ireland. All are in hospital out-patient departments.

If you are pregnant

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

A colposcopy is safe during pregnancy.

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

You can read more about colposcopy and pregnancy on [hse.ie/cervicalcheck](https://www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck)

What happens during a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is usually carried out in a hospital clinic. It usually takes about 15-20 minutes and you can go home the same day.

During the procedure:

- 1.** You undress from the waist down. You might not have to remove a loose skirt if you wear one
- 2.** A device called a speculum is inserted into your vagina and gently opened – this is similar to having a cervical screening test
- 3.** A microscope with a light is used to look at your cervix
- 4.** A special dye is applied to your cervix to highlight any abnormal areas
- 5.** A small sample of tissue (a biopsy) may be removed for closer examination in a laboratory. This may be a bit uncomfortable

If it is clear during the examination that you have abnormal cells in your cervix, you may have treatment to remove the cells immediately. This usually can be done in 5 or 10 minutes. A biopsy sample will also be sent to a laboratory (lab).

If it's not clear if you have abnormal cell changes, a biopsy sample may be taken and sent to a lab. You'll need to wait until you get your biopsy results to have treatment.

It's often possible to tell you right away if there are any abnormal cell changes in your cervix. If you have a biopsy, you will get your results in the post.

The result of your colposcopy and the result of your biopsy will be either normal or abnormal.

Do you need anyone with you?

No, you don't need anyone to come with you but you are welcome to have your partner, a friend or relative with you.

A nurse will be there to provide support and answer any questions you may have.

If you have young children, you should try and arrange for someone to look after them rather than bringing them to the clinic.

How to prepare for your colposcopy?

For at least 24 hours before your appointment you should avoid:

- using vaginal medications, lubricants or creams
- washing directly inside your vagina (douching)

You can eat and drink as normal before your colposcopy. Try to eat something before your appointment.

What if your period is due?

If you have your period or it is due, you may need to reschedule your appointment. Please contact the clinic to discuss.

What treatments are used to remove abnormal cells?

You'll usually have treatment if there's a moderate or high chance of the cells becoming cancerous if left untreated.

There are several simple and effective ways to remove the abnormal cells. Most treatments are carried out under local anaesthetic at the clinic.

These include:

- LLETZ – this involves using a heated wire loop that removes the abnormal cells
- a cone biopsy – this involves removing a cone-shaped piece of tissue containing the abnormal cells from your cervix
- cold coagulation – this involves applying a heat source to the cervix to destroy the abnormal cells

More information about treatment to remove abnormal cells can be found at [hse.ie/cervicalcheck](https://www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck)

After the appointment

After the colposcopy examination, you will be able to return to normal activity (this includes going home, back to work or college, and driving).

If you have had a biopsy, you may have a light, blood-stained discharge for a few days. This is normal and it should clear itself. To allow your cervix to heal, it is best to avoid having sex for a few days.

If you have had a treatment, you should take things easy for the rest of the day. You will be given information about your care after treatment at your appointment.

Private colposcopy

If you have a colposcopy as a private patient, you will have to pay a fee. Your colposcopy will not be through CervicalCheck.

If you have a colposcopy as a private patient, we will be unable to access your results and information. We only have access to results and recommendations for tests taken with CervicalCheck.

Risks and side effects of colposcopy treatment

Common side effects of treatment include:

1. Mild pain, like period pain – this should pass in a few hours and you can take paracetamol or ibuprofen for the pain
2. Light vaginal bleeding and brown, watery vaginal discharge – this may last for 4 to 6 weeks
3. Heavier than usual first period after treatment – your periods will return to normal

Serious complications (small risk) include:

1. An infection

An infection can cause heavy or persistent bleeding or smelly vaginal discharge. It can also cause a fever or constant tummy pain.

If you have any of these symptoms, contact the colposcopy clinic or see your GP immediately.

2. A slightly increased risk of premature birth (before the 37th week of pregnancy) in future pregnancies.

An increased risk of premature birth in future pregnancies is more likely if:

- you need repeated treatments
- a lot of tissue needs to be removed

In most cases, the benefits of treatment will outweigh these risks.

Talk to your GP or nurse if you have any concerns.

They can tell you more about the potential risks of colposcopy treatment.

More information about risks and side effects of colposcopy treatment can be found at **[hse.ie/cervicalcheck](https://www.hse.ie/cervicalcheck)**

How do we use your personal information?

CervicalCheck takes and securely stores your personal information (name, address, phone number, date of birth, PPSN, surname at birth and mother's maiden name) and cervical screening history. Your cervical screening history relates to your participation in CervicalCheck.

It can include HPV cervical screening results, colposcopy attendances, treatments and biopsy (test sample) results.

We will use your information to contact you when your next screening test is due or when your results are available. We also exchange your information with the other health services that deliver the programme. This includes the doctor or nurse who takes your screening test, the laboratory, colposcopy clinics and the National Cancer Registry Ireland. This is to maintain and improve the quality of the service.

We may use your screening test sample in teaching, in reviews and audits and to check the quality and effectiveness of the programme. We may also use your information to invite you to take part in research.

It is your choice to take part in screening or not. We will never use your name in any reports, when teaching or in reviews. We will keep your personal information safe and confidential in line with current data protection regulations.

You will have full and open access to your personal information held by CervicalCheck upon request. It is important that you let CervicalCheck know if your details change. To find out how to access your records, see **hse.ie/gdpr/**
data-requests

For further information see the HSE Privacy Notice – Patients and Service Users at **hse.ie/gdpr**

Communicating with you

We will communicate with you in an open, honest, timely and transparent manner if:

- something goes wrong with your care
- you experience harm as a result of your care
- we think that harm may have occurred

This means that we will keep you fully informed of the facts and details related to your participation in the Cervical Screening Programme.

Feedback and contact information

We welcome your feedback.

Email: info@cervicalcheck.ie

Freephone: 1800 45 45 55

Website: hse.ie/cervicalcheck

Post: CervicalCheck, Freepost LK407, Limerick



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