

PATIENT RESOURCES

Colposcopy

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure that is done for an abnormal result on a Pap test or HPV test. Sometimes it is recommended if the cervix does not look normal. The cervix is the bottom portion of the uterus that providers can see when they use a speculum to look in the vagina.

How is it done?

The provider will place a speculum in the vagina, just like when you get a Pap test. The provider will then look closely at your cervix using a bright light and magnification after applying a liquid (acetic acid, or vinegar) that makes abnormal tissue easier to see. If the provider sees anything abnormal, they will usually take a biopsy. A cervical biopsy is a procedure to remove a small piece of skin from the cervix to test for abnormal or precancerous conditions, or cervical cancer.

What should I do to prepare for a colposcopy?

You do not need to do anything special to prepare for a colposcopy. Colposcopy can be done if you have had sex recently or if you have light bleeding, like the beginning or end of your period. If your bleeding is very heavy, or if you prefer, you may want to call your provider's office to see if you need to reschedule. However, if your provider recommended that you have a colposcopy, it is very important that you complete the procedure as scheduled to avoid any risk of cancer.

What can the results show?

The results of the colposcopy and biopsy can range from normal to, in rare cases, cancer. Most will have either a normal or low-grade result (also called cervical intraepithelial lesion grade 1 or CIN 1). In this case, your provider will usually recommend follow up with a Pap and HPV test in 12 months. If the result shows a pre-cancer or cervical dysplasia (also called cervical intraepithelial lesion grade 2 or 3 or CIN 2 or 3), your provider will usually recommend treatment. These treatments include LEEP, cone, laser, and cryotherapy procedures. You can find more information in this health information resource.