

Strong Health Midwifery Group/RAMP Office

COLPOSCOPY FACT SHEET

You have been advised to have an examination using a colposcope for one (or more) of the following reasons:

- Your last Pap smear has been reported "abnormal". This means you should have tests to find out where these abnormal cells are and what type of abnormal cells is present.
- As a screening test, a Pap smear may not give the complete picture. With the help of an instrument called a colposcope, a biopsy (tissue sample) can be taken. This significantly improves the accuracy of diagnosis.
- An abnormal appearing area has been seen on your cervix
- If you are a DES-exposed daughter, it is therefore advisable to look at the and vagina to check for possible changes

What is a colposcope?

A colposcope is an instrument mounted on a stand and used to look at the cervix (mouth of the womb) and vagina through a low power microscope. The colposcope may have a camera attachment so that pictures of the cervix may be kept to check for change at a later exam. This is called cervicography.

What is colposcopy?

Colposcopy is a painless examination of the cervix and vagina with a low power microscope. This exam is usually done between menstrual periods and generally takes less than ten minutes. A woman lies down in the position used to take a Pap smear, and a speculum, is inserted into the vagina to give a view of the cervix and vagina.

Why is a woman advised to have an exam with a colposcope?

If the cervix looks abnormal or if a Pap smear indicates the presence of abnormal cells, colposcopy may help in diagnosis and in planning of treatment.

It may be difficult to find out the condition of the cervix by simply looking with the naked eye. A magnified view may clarify abnormalities or show that cervical changes are not abnormal. If abnormal cells are found, a colposcopic exam can be used to decide from which areas a biopsy should be taken.

What is a biopsy of the cervix?

A biopsy of the cervix is a small piece (or pieces of tissue) from the cervix removed with a specially designed instrument. This is done during colposcopy. This tissue is then sent to a laboratory where it is examined under a microscope, and a diagnosis is made. You will be contacted about the results.

Is a biopsy painful?

Most women describe the procedure as feeling like a sharp pinch. Some experience a menstrual-type cramp. There may be slight spotting or bleeding for a few days after a cervical biopsy.

What treatment will I need?

Sometimes the examination shows that no treatment is needed, but further follow up is still important. The treatment varies with the exact diagnosis, where the abnormal cells are, and any other problems you may have. Treatment may involve freezing the cervix, using medicine in the vagina, or using laser to remove the abnormal cells. Rarely is surgery necessary. The treatment plans will be discussed with you after the biopsy report is complete.