

**If you have any urgent problems outside of
normal clinic hours please contact:**

Ward 3E on 0151 430 1522

Important Notice

**If you are unable to attend for your
appointment please telephone the clinic in
advance so that your appointment
can be given to someone else**

**This leaflet can be made available in alternative
languages/formats on request**

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01744 646301

Colposcopy Clinic

**Colposcopy
Examination**

Patient information leaflet

**St Helens Hospital
Marshalls Cross Road
St Helens WA9 3DA**

Why do I need a colposcopy examination?

You have been asked to come for a colposcopy examination because your cervical screening test has shown evidence of abnormal cells. Or you may have been referred due to having had a number of inadequate results from your screening tests.

An abnormal result is not unusual – it happens in about one in twenty tests. An abnormal result usually means that small changes have been found in the cells on the cervix (the neck of the womb). These abnormal changes are known as dyskaryosis and act as early warning signals that cervical cancer might develop in the future.

It is important to remember that it is very rare for these abnormalities to be cancer

The examination you will have is called colposcopy. It is simple, quick and generally painless. It allows the doctor or nurse colposcopist to decide if you need treatment.

For some women the changes in the cervix return to normal by themselves. Other women will need some simple outpatient treatment that is almost 100 per cent effective.

What is colposcopy?

Colposcopy is a simple examination that allows the doctor or nurse to see the type and area of the abnormality on your cervix. It also lets the doctor or nurse decide if you need treatment.

The instrument used is called a colposcope and is really just a large magnifying glass which lets the doctor or nurse look more closely at the changes on your cervix. It does not go inside you.

For most women this is a painless examination, but some may find it a bit uncomfortable.

Colposcopy can be done safely during pregnancy and will not affect your baby's birth, nor will it affect your ability to become pregnant in the future. However, treatment is usually postponed until after your baby is born.

Is there anything I can do before the examination?

You are welcome to arrange for a relative or friend to come with you to the colposcopy clinic. In some clinics he or she will be allowed to stay with you during the examination if you wish.

- **Please note it is important you are not having a period during this examination.**
- **However, if you are experiencing abnormal or irregular bleeding please contact the clinic for advice: 01744 646301**

The actual examination only takes about **15 minutes**, but allow at least **one hour** for the whole visit.

You may wish to wear a full skirt to avoid removing all your lower clothing during the examination.

Some women have a slight discharge after the examination. You may want to bring a sanitary towel, just in case.

What happens before the examination?

First the doctor or nurse will want to ask you some questions. These questions relate to your periods, the type of contraception you use, any operations or illnesses you have had in the past, and so on.

You will then be taken into a separate changing room and asked to undress from the waist downwards (though a full skirt need not be removed).

What exactly happens during the examination?

The colposcopy nurse will help you to position yourself on a special type of couch. The couch has padded supports on which you rest your legs. The Colposcope is just a large magnifying glass with a light source attached. It looks like a pair of binoculars on a stand. It does not touch you or go inside you.

The doctor will then dab different liquids onto your cervix to help identify and highlight any areas of abnormal cells. The abnormal areas will appear white.

If any abnormal area is identified, a small sample of tissue – a biopsy – may be taken from the surface of the cervix. A biopsy is about the size of a pinhead. You may feel a slight stinging, but it should not be painful.

- The biopsy will be sent to the laboratory for further tests.
- We will send you a letter to your home address telling you of the biopsy result in about 4 weeks.
- The letter will also have information on whether you will need further assessment or treatment in the Colposcopy Clinic, including a contact number if you have any questions or need to rearrange your appointment.

What will the examination show?

Colposcopy identifies the type and size of the abnormal area on the cervix. The results show if you need treatment and if so, what kind of treatment.

The result of a biopsy shows how abnormal the area is. It may also show if further treatment is needed.

The technical term used to refer to cell changes confirmed by a biopsy is **Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia**, more commonly known as **CIN**.

In order to tell the difference between the various states of change, doctors have developed a scale from **1 to 3** according to how many of the cells are affected.

CIN 1 means that only **one third** of the cells in the affected area are abnormal. These may be left to return to normal or may be treated, depending on your doctor's opinion.

CIN 2 means that **up to two thirds** of the cells in the affected area are abnormal. Treatment will usually be recommended.

CIN 3 means that **all the cells** in the affected area are abnormal. **Treatment is highly recommended.**

Only very rarely will a biopsy show cell changes that have already developed into cancer. Surgery and more extensive treatments are generally used to treat cervical cancer.

What if I need treatment?

If your examination shows that you need treatment it will be carried out during your visit to the colposcopy clinic. You will receive information about the treatment before your visit. If you have not received this information, contact the Colposcopy clinic and we will be pleased to send it to you.

There are several equally effective methods available to treat CIN. The aim of all methods of treatment is to destroy all the cells affected by CIN, with the least disruption to normal tissue.

The choice of treatment will depend on your particular case, the preferred method of the doctor doing the colposcopy, and on the methods available at the clinic.

You can be treated for most abnormalities as an outpatient and so you will not need to stay in hospital.

Treatment is nearly always 100 per cent successful and it is unlikely that CIN will recur.

What should I do after treatment?

- If treatment was given following colposcopy you may have a bloodstained discharge for two to four weeks.
- During this time, and when you have your period, you will need to use sanitary towels rather than tampons.
- It is also best to avoid heavy exercise and not to have sexual intercourse.
- These measures allow the cervix to heal as quickly as possible.
- Treatment for CIN will have little or no effect on your future fertility, nor on your risk of having a miscarriage.

Will I need to have checkups?

Yes

- It is important to keep your appointments to make sure that your cervix is still healthy
- Most colposcopy clinics have a follow-up check between four and six months after the examination or treatment.

- During this visit the doctor or nurse will take a cervical screening test and may do another colposcopy examination to make sure that the cervix is healthy again.
- You may have another follow-up check **six months** later. This visit will be similar to the previous one.

If everything is satisfactory after your treatment and follow-up test(s), you are usually advised to have screening carried out every year by your screening practitioner for up to **ten years**. This depends on the CIN you were treated for.

It is hospital policy not to give results over the telephone

- Please note this treatment cannot be carried out during a period
- If you are experiencing abnormal or irregular bleeding please telephone our clinic for advice – 01744 646301
- Whilst under the care of the colposcopy clinic please do not attend your GP surgery for any smears as all necessary smears will be done here in the colposcopy clinic