

Colposcopy Service

Treatment of abnormal smears

Information for patients



UHSM

Your Hospital

This leaflet has been created in the hope that you will feel less anxious when you come for the treatment. However it is not a personalised document and you should remember that there might be some differences between the information given here and your particular case.

Why do I need treatment?

Following your recent cervical smear test and/or colposcopy examination of the cervix, you have been advised that you may need treatment to the abnormal cells of the cervix. For the majority of women it is highly unlikely that they have cancer. It usually means that the cells are showing changes which may be pre-cancerous. Although not all of them may have a tendency to turn cancerous, it could take up to 10 - 15 years for these cells to become cancerous if left untreated.

Your results will be discussed with you in more detail when you attend for your appointment. The pre-cancerous condition is known as CIN (Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia). The aim of treatment is to prevent potential pre-cancerous changes from developing into cancer by destroying all the abnormal cells with the minimal destruction of normal healthy tissue. There is a 95% chance of cure with a first-time treatment, with only a minority of women requiring further treatment.

What treatments are available?

The treatment for the abnormal smears can be very simple and can be undertaken in the Colposcopy clinic as an outpatient procedure. This means that it only takes a short time; the actual procedure takes less than ten minutes so you can go home following the treatment and carry on routine activities as soon as you feel comfortable.

There are two main treatment types commonly performed in out-patient Colposcopy Clinics:
the abnormal cells may be destroyed using laser ablation, cold coagulation, cryocautery or
the abnormal cells may be excised (cut away) using a loop diathermy.

Here at University Hospital of South Manchester the main method of treatment is loop diathermy excision, more commonly referred to as LLETZ (Large Loop Excision of the Transformation Zone).

What does a LLETZ treatment involve?

In this method, under local anaesthetic a fine wire loop heated by electricity is used to run through and remove the part of skin containing the abnormal cells. This is then sent to the laboratory for further analysis to check for the completeness of the procedure and to check from the final result whether or not you need further treatment.

The majority of treatments are usually carried out as out-patient procedures using local anaesthetic which numbs the cervix, but sometimes a short, day-case procedure under anaesthetic is required. If you do not wish for an outpatient procedure or are not suitable for one, this can be discussed with your colposcopist at the time of your consultation and arrangements can be made for the treatment to be done as a day case procedure in theatre.

Are there any risks associated with the treatment?

The risks and complications associated with LLETZ treatment have been measured in all colposcopy clinics across the UK, and are known to affect a very small percentage of women. The main risks and complications are associated with:

- **Bleeding** - You are likely to have some bleeding during treatment but this is expected to be minimal and is usually well-controlled by the colposcopist during the procedure.

- **Infection** - Vaginal discharge is expected after the treatment. However if this is associated with heavy bleeding and is offensive it may indicate infection of the treatment site. It may happen after a few days or weeks following the treatment. The likelihood of infection occurring is less than 2% of all treated women, and may simply need antibiotics to treat.
- **Risk of secondary cervical stenosis** - Cervical stenosis (narrowing of the birth canal) affects 1-2% of women after treatment, although it is more likely to occur in post-menopausal women. This does not usually cause problems, but can create difficulties with follow up smears.
- **Travel** – it is advised that you do not travel abroad for 3 weeks after treatment, due to the risk of complications. If travel is unavoidable, please check with your travel/flight insurance.

What about future pregnancy?

It is very unlikely that a single treatment procedure will affect your ability to become pregnant or affect a future pregnancy.

However, research has shown a small rise in the risk of pre-term delivery (birth before 37 weeks) and low birth weight babies (less than 2,500g). The risks are extremely small and tend to be associated with multiple treatments and/or treatment procedures where more than 10mm of cervical tissue is removed.

It is obviously important that abnormal cells are treated in the appropriate way, but please be reassured that consideration to future fertility is an important aspect of care.

The following points are guidelines which apply to treatment procedures carried out in the out-patient department. If your treatment requires a general anaesthetic, this will be discussed with you when you come to clinic and you will be given additional information.

What happens when I come for treatment?

You are welcome to bring a friend or relative with you. They will be allowed to stay with you throughout the procedure if you wish.

The actual treatment procedure takes a few minutes, but you should allow about an hour for the whole visit.

Before the examination you will be asked to undress from the waist downwards. Sheets will be provided to cover you.

The nurse will help you to position yourself on the examination couch and will make sure that you are comfortable throughout the procedure.

Will the treatment hurt?

Treatment is expected to be relatively painless and is usually well-tolerated. You will be aware of the Colposcopist carrying out your treatment and some women may feel some “period-type” discomfort, but this is expected to be minimal.

You will be given a local anaesthetic injection into the cervix, similar to that used by a dentist, which numbs the cervix. Some women experience a stinging sensation with the local anaesthetic but there should be no pain during the actual treatment. A fine wire loop will then be heated by electricity and is used to run through and remove the part of skin of cervix containing the abnormal cells. This is then sent to laboratory.

Fumes emitted during the treatment are removed by a tube connected to the special speculum at one end, and a fume extractor machine at the other end. The machines used may be rather noisy. This is normal; there is no need for alarm.

What happens after treatment?

We prefer that you go straight home following treatment and rest, but you usually do not need to take any extra time off work.

You are likely to experience some bleeding/vaginal discharge after treatment. This might not start straight away and may last as long as four weeks. The discharge might be anything from slight spotting to a flow as heavy as an average period. It should not be excessive or offensive. If the bleeding is so heavy as to be “trickling”, or if you are worried in any way, please ring the clinic and a nurse will be able to advise you.

Will I get to know the results?

Generally you will be given an appointment to come to the Colposcopy clinic for a repeat smear or Colposcopy with the smear in six months' time, as this is all that is needed for most women. We will write to you to discuss any results which need more attention than this and an appointment will be sent to you to see the doctor in the clinic.

Your next period may be slightly heavier than usual and you may pass some clots. This is normal and will sort itself out over the next couple of months. Treatment does not usually affect the menstrual cycle.

There are some precautions to be taken following the treatment for 4-6 weeks to allow proper healing of the cervix. They are:

- Avoid using tampons; use pads instead
- Avoid sexual intercourse
- Avoid douche inside the vagina.
- Avoid the use of talcum powder, vaginal deodorants, heavily perfumed soaps and bubble baths, as they may cause irritation and increase the risk of infection.
- You can carry on with normal everyday activities as usual. It is however sensible to avoid strenuous exercise and heavy lifting for two to three weeks after treatment.

Pain after treatment is expected to be minimal (similar to period-type pains). If you experience any pain or discomfort, simple analgesics such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen should be effective.

It is very important that you attend the Colposcopy clinic when any appointment is made for you. If you cannot attend, for any reason, please let us know so that someone else can use the appointment time and we can arrange another appointment for you.

We hope that you have found the information in this leaflet helpful. If you require any further advice regarding any aspect of your care, please do not hesitate to contact the Colposcopy Clinic on 0161 291 5446.

The nursing staff will be happy to help with any ongoing concerns or anxieties.

Useful websites for further information

www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk

www.jotrust.co.uk

Please forward any comments to:

Nurse Colposcopist

Women's Health Suite

Wythenshawe Hospital

Manchester M23 9LT

0161 291 5446