

Your Colposcopy Exam: What to Expect



During a colposcopy exam, your provider looks at your cervix.

Why do I need a colposcopy?

Your Pap test or human papilloma virus (HPV) test showed there may be changes in the cells of the cervix that could lead to cancer. A colposcopy is a special exam that can find these cell changes. If abnormal cells are found, your provider will explain what needs to be done next. You can get the care you need before it becomes cervical cancer.

How is the colposcopy exam done?

The cervix is the opening into the uterus. A colposcopy exam is a way for your clinician to get a very close-up look at your cervix.

The clinician will look at your cervix with a bright light through a magnifying lens. This lens is called a colposcope.

This careful look at your cervix helps check for any cells with abnormal changes.

What if abnormal changes are seen?

A biopsy or other tests may be done at the same time as the exam. Sometimes your clinician can tell you right away if there are abnormal cells and what you should do next. But sometimes you will need to wait until the biopsy results are back from the lab. It takes about 7-14 days for biopsy results to come back from the lab.

What should I do before the exam?

For the 24 hours before the exam, do not put anything in your vagina. It will be easier to see the cervix if you:

- Do not wash or douche inside your vagina.
- Do not put any medicine in your vagina.

It's best to have your exam done when you are not on your period.



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What happens during a colposcopy?

The exam takes about 5 to 10 minutes. Your clinician will explain what to expect:

- You will be asked to undress from the waist down. This is just like when you had your Pap test or HPV test. You will be given a sheet so you can cover your belly and legs.
- You will lie down on a table. You will be asked to rest your feet in footrests at the end of the table.
- Your clinician will gently open your vagina with a speculum. Then they will wash your cervix with vinegar. This makes it easier to see any abnormal cell changes. The colposcope does not touch you or go inside you.
- Your clinician will carefully look at your cervix through the colposcope.



Based on what they see, you may need biopsies.

What happens during a biopsy?

During a biopsy, your clinician will use an instrument to take one or more tiny bits of skin from the cervix. These will be sent to a lab. Each biopsy is about the size of $\frac{1}{2}$ of a kernel of rice. You may feel some cramping or a pinch.

You also may be checked for cell changes inside the opening of the cervix. This takes about 30 seconds, and you may feel some cramping.

Will it hurt to have a colposcopy?

You might feel pressure when the speculum goes in. It might sting or burn when your cervix is washed with the vinegar. If you get a biopsy, you might have a feeling like a sharp pinch or a period cramp.

What do I need to know after a biopsy?

You may have some mild cramps.

You also may have some light bleeding for 4 or 5 days after a biopsy. It may be bright red, brown, or pink. You may need to use a small pad. Do not use tampons.

Sometimes during the exam clinicians use a liquid that will make your discharge look black or brown. It may look like coffee grounds. This is normal and will stop in a few days.

Give your cervix a chance to heal. Do not put anything in your vagina for 2 days or until the bleeding has stopped.

- Do not wash or douche inside your vagina.
- Do not use tampons.
- Do not let your partner put a penis, fingers, or sex toys in your vagina.

Call your provider **right away** if you have:

- Heavy bleeding that doesn't stop
- Bad cramps or pain in your pelvis
- Smelly discharge from your vagina

Will I need treatment?

This depends on the biopsy results. Some people will not need treatment. Other people will need treatment to remove the abnormal cells. The treatment will depend on the type of abnormal cells and where they are found.

Do not wait!

- The important thing is to get the care you need as soon as you can.
- If you have any questions, ask your Family PACT provider.