

You have been referred for a colposcopy to closely examine the neck of your womb (cervix). This is because you have had a mildly abnormal smear (low grade) and /or because some high-risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV) was detected.

What does having an abnormal smear result mean?

An abnormal smear suggests that you MAY have some abnormal cells, known as dyskaryosis, in the skin of your cervix. Dyskariosis is common and having these changes does NOT mean that you have cervical cancer.

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a very common virus that we will all likely come into contact with at some point in our lives. Our bodies will usually clear HPV. In most people this takes around two years.

A test for HPV is now the first test undertaken on a smear and if the HPV test is positive but the cells look normal you will have a repeat test in 12 months. Referral for colposcopy usually occurs after three tests have been HPV positive.

Having a smear in Wales which is positive for HPV but with normal looking cells (Negative / HPV detected) carries a very low risk (3-7%) of abnormal cells.

Why have I been referred to the hospital?

You have been referred to the Colposcopy clinic so that your low grade and / or HPV positive smear result can be investigated further.

What will happen at my appointment?

The reason why you have been referred will be fully explained and you will be able to ask questions.

A specially trained doctor or nurse (colposcopist) will examine your cervix with a colposcope. This is like a microscope that magnifies and lights your cervix but **does not** go inside you. A speculum (the same instrument that goes inside your vagina when you have a smear test) is used to see your cervix.

The Colposcopy should not be painful although sometimes a little uncomfortable. A nurse will be present to offer support.

If you wish you can watch the examination on a screen and the colposcopist will explain everything to you.

After a mild vinegar solution is put onto your cervix abnormal cells look different to normal cells and can usually be seen through the colposcope.

If your cervix looks normal, you will likely be discharged from colposcopy and go back to routine three yearly smears. This is because we know the risk of abnormal cells that need treatment within three years of a normal examination is very low.

Occasionally repeat smears are done earlier in colposcopy and the reason for this will be explained to you.

If an abnormal area is seen then a very small biopsy can be taken. Often women do not feel a biopsy being taken but if you do it should be no worse than a sharp pinch. The biopsy is then sent to our laboratory for analysis; the results will show whether you have abnormal cells called **Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasia (CIN)**.

C	Cervical	On the Cervix
I	Intraepithelial	Means that the abnormal cells are limited to the skin and do not go any deeper
N	Neoplasia	Just another word for abnormal cells

CIN is NOT Cancer

CIN occurs in different stages:

- CIN 1: mildly abnormal changes in the skin cells
- CIN 2: moderately abnormal changes in the skin cells
- CIN 3: severely abnormal changes in the skin cells
- CGIN: occasionally the abnormal cells come from the 'inside' or entrance to your cervix and this is known as Cervical **Glandular** Intraepithelial Neoplasia

You will get the results of your biopsy in a letter usually in about 4-6 weeks.

If your biopsy shows no CIN (negative) you will usually be discharged and returned to the three yearly smear programme.

If the biopsy shows CIN 1 we generally just 'watch and wait' because we know that this mild area is very likely to get better of its own accord. You will likely be discharged for another smear, with your GP, in twelve months.

If the biopsy shows CIN 2, 3 or CGIN then generally we offer treatment to remove these abnormal cells.

This is NOT because they are cancer but because we do not know if they will become cancer or not in years to come.

Treatment is carried out at another appointment a few weeks later.

With a low grade smear in Wales the risk of abnormal cells which need treating is low (around 17%).

General information

The Colposcopy unit in Cardiff is very busy and appointments are valuable so please try to attend the appointment that has been given if possible. If you are unable to attend then please ring the Colposcopy office on the number on the front of this leaflet as soon as possible so that they can rearrange your appointment and offer the vacant appointment to somebody else.

It is usually not necessary to postpone an appointment due to a period unless you are bleeding heavily (middle few days).

Please keep the appointment if you are pregnant. Having a Colposcopy poses no risk to a pregnancy but let the colposcopist know before the examination as we normally do not take biopsies or smears in pregnancy.

Leaflet written by Sue Ashman, Nurse Colposcopist,
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**Information and advice
about your
colposcopy
appointment in Cardiff**

**(Low grade and / or
HPV positive result)**

Colposcopy Services office
02921 841860
Monday – Friday 08:30 – 16:00

Further information about having a colposcopy
can be found at:
<https://www.jostrust.org.uk/information/colposcopy>