

## What is a colposcopy?

This is a procedure where a colposcope is used to look closely at the cervix, vagina or vulva. A **colposcope** looks like binoculars mounted on a stand. It magnifies, or enlarges, what is seen. Your doctor will be able to see problems that cannot be seen by the eye alone.

## When is this procedure used?

It is used as a follow-up after these conditions:

- Abnormal pap test
- Positive HPV test results
- Abnormal skin changes
- Unexplained bleeding from the vagina

## How do I prepare for the procedure?

On the day of the colposcopy, you will have a pregnancy test. The pregnancy test will be performed on the day of your procedure unless you are in menopause. Your provider may recommend against having a procedure if there is any chance that you could be pregnant at the time of your visit. If it is possible, you may become pregnant before the procedure, you should:

- Abstain from intercourse 2 weeks before your appointment
- or**
- Use a method of birth control regularly for 2 weeks before your appointment
- or**
- You may schedule your appointment within the 7 days following the first day of your period.

### **Instructions for just before and when you arrive for your appointment:**

- Tell your doctor if you think you might be pregnant.
- Eat something light before your appointment
- Do not urinate just before arrival, you will need to give a urine sample for a pregnancy test.
- For at least 24 hours before the procedure **do not** have vaginal intercourse or douche
- To manage any pain, take an over-the-counter pain medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve) 30 minutes before you arrive
- If you take aspirin or some other blood thinner, ask your doctor if you should stop taking it before your test. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do. These medicines increase the risk of bleeding.

### **What if I am having my period on the day of the procedure?**

- If the bleeding is light or spotting, come to your procedure.
- If the bleeding is heavier than this, reschedule your appointment if possible.

### **What can I expect during the procedure?**

1. You will get on an exam table, like you do for a pelvic exam.
2. The doctor will put a speculum in your vagina.
3. The doctor may apply a liquid that will help show abnormal-appearing areas. This may cause a burning or tingling sensation.
4. Your doctor may remove a small piece of tissue, called a **biopsy**, to send to the lab. Sometimes more than one biopsy is collected. You may feel some pressure or cramping during a biopsy of the cervix.
5. Your doctor may inject some local anesthesia before collecting a biopsy from the vulva or lower vagina.
6. Your doctor may use a substance to stop bleeding. Dark gray or brown discharge after this is normal.

## **What are the possible risks from this procedure?**

We work very hard to make sure your procedure is as safe and comfortable as possible, but problems can occur, even when things go as planned. It is important that you are aware of these possible problems, how often they happen, and what will be done to correct them. Rarely, there is unexpectedly heavy bleeding following a biopsy. If this happens, the problem will be managed as appropriate.

Possible risks that can occur days to weeks after surgery include:

- Heavy bleeding: rare.
- Infection: this is treated with antibiotics. The risk of infection is less than 1 in 100.

## **When will I go home after procedure?**

Most people go home immediately after the procedure.

## **After I get home, when do I need to call my doctor?**

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following signs and symptoms:

- A fever over 100.4° Fahrenheit (38° Celsius)
- Heavy bleeding (soak a regular pad in an hour or less)
- Severe pain in your abdomen (belly) or pelvis that the pain medication is not helping
- Heavy vaginal discharge (spotting and light discharge are normal)

## **How will I care for myself at home after procedure?**

- Bleeding: Spotting blood or brown-colored discharge (old blood) is normal and may last for up to 1 week.
- Showers: Showers and baths are allowed as soon as you want after your procedure.

- Exercise: You may begin normal physical activity immediately after the procedure. Ask your doctor when you can start specific activities like swimming.
- Sex: Do not have vaginal intercourse for 24 hours after the procedure if your doctor took a biopsy (a small amount of tissue).
- Work: Most people return to work immediately after the procedure.

### **Follow-up with your doctor:**

If your procedure included a biopsy, it is important that you understand how you will get results and plan follow-up. Please discuss this with your doctor before you go home after the procedure.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by University of Michigan (U-M) Health for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by U-M Health and for which U-M Health does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Charisse Loder, MD

Reviewers: Rosalyn Maben-Feaster, MD

Edited by: Karelyn Munro BA

Patient Education by [U-M Health](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 01/2022