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Colposcopy of the Vagina and Cervix

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a test in which the doctor uses an instrument called a colposcope to look at the vagina and cervix and possibly take a sample of tissue. A colposcope has a series of lenses that magnify the tissue in the vagina and cervix so that the doctor can directly examine the organs.

Tell your doctor if you think you may be pregnant. Your doctor will want to perform the procedure in a different way if you are pregnant.

When is it used?

This test may be done after you have had abnormal Pap test results indicating an infection, a pre-cancerous growth, or cancer.

Examples of alternatives include:

- To try other treatment, such as a conization of the cervix
- To choose not to have treatment, recognizing the risks of your condition.
- You should ask your doctor about these choices.

How do I prepare for a colposcopy?

The test is easy and brief. No particular preparation is necessary.

What happens during the procedure?

The doctor will use a colposcope to look into your vagina. You will lie on the examining table just as for a regular pelvic exam. The doctor will use an instrument to spread the vaginal walls apart, then place the colposcope at the vaginal opening.

When your doctor looks into the vagina, he or she will see your cervix. If the doctor finds some problem tissue, he or she may use an instrument to pinch or cut off a small tissue sample. You may feel a pinch or slight cramp. Then the doctor will remove the instruments. The tissue will be sent to the lab.

What happens after the procedure?

You may feel a little lightheaded right after the test. You may have to lie down for a few minutes after the test is over. The doctor will tell you what he or she saw. The test results should be ready in a few days or weeks, depending on the lab. Ask the doctor what other steps you should take and when you should come back for a checkup.

What are the benefits of this procedure?

The doctor should be able to make a better diagnosis of the problem in your cervix and vagina and suggest further treatment if necessary.

What are the risks associated with this procedure?

Minor bleeding from the biopsy site may occur. Other risks include:
heavy bleeding (more than one pad per hour or more bleeding than your menstrual flow)
infection.

You should ask your doctor how these risks apply to you.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if you have:

- Heavy bleeding
- Fever
- Pelvic pain
- Call the doctor during office hours if:
 - You have questions about the test or its result
 - You want to make another appointment.