

Colposcopy

What Is It?

Colposcopy is the examination of the cervix through a special instrument, which shows a magnified view of the cervix (literally a microscope mounted on a stand). Colposcopy is useful in evaluating abnormal Pap smears (dysplasia), unusual lesions of the cervix or vagina, and D.E.S.-exposed women. To begin, the cervix is washed with a dilute vinegar solution (acetic acid) to make the cells stand out and to remove mucus. The cervix is then examined carefully and any areas of abnormal appearance are identified. If deemed necessary, samples of abnormal areas may be taken at this time through small cervical biopsies or cervical scrapings.

What Causes Abnormal Pap Smears?

Pap smears may be abnormal because of inflammatory changes or because of true dysplasias. Inflammatory changes are caused by infections or other irritants (usually unidentified) which produce reactive changes in the cervical cells and which will usually disappear without treatment in less than 3-6 months. True dysplasias are abnormal cell changes with the potential of progressing into cancer of the cervix over several years (usually 2-10) depending on degree. True dysplasias require active identification, treatment and follow up to prevent more serious complications later on.

Is It Painful?

Colposcopy is not a painful examination, although it may require remaining in the pelvic exam position longer than usual. Cervical biopsies or cervical scraping may cause a short pinching sensation or mild cramps.

What Can I Do After The Examination?

Light bleeding or spotting from biopsy sites may last for 2-3 days. Tampons may be used but intercourse should be avoided for 1-2 days. Activities should otherwise be normal.

When Do I Get The Results?

The pathologist will send the biopsy results to the doctor approximately one week after the sample is taken. We will call or send you a note about 10-14 days after your colposcopy visit. An explanation of the results will be given at that time and a specific recommendation for follow-up treatment will be made. The pathologists' services may be billed separately and you will receive a billing statement from them for evaluating the tissue samples.