



What you need to know about treatments you may receive in colposcopy

Colposcopy treatment

When you have a colposcopy, you may be advised that you have to have a treatment to remove abnormal cells from the cervix (neck of womb) or you may have a biopsy (tissue removed from the cervix for further investigation).

A colposcopy is simply a more detailed examination of the cervix. Instead of looking at the cervix with the naked eye, special magnifying binoculars are used to see if treatment is needed.

You will be offered a treatment if your colposcopist (a doctor or specialist nurse carrying out a colposcopy examination) thinks you need one. This is to minimise the risk of developing cervical cancer. There will be an opportunity for you to talk to your colposcopist about your care and treatment.

As part of the cervical screening programme any recommended treatment provided is free of charge.

What you need to know about abnormal cells

Abnormal cell changes are often called CIN (cervical intraepithelial neoplasia). There are three different grades of cell changes.

- CIN 2 and CIN 3 are changes that may need treatment. (They are called high-grade changes).

At your colposcopy, you and your colposcopist will discuss if you need treatment.

Treatment for abnormal cells may be done on:

- the day of your colposcopy or
- after the results of a biopsy taken during your colposcopy.

Treatments for abnormal cells

There are two common ways to treat abnormal cells in the cervix in a colposcopy clinic. They are called:

- LLETZ
- cold coagulation.

For both treatments you will first have a colposcopy. The colposcopy appointment takes about 15 to 20 minutes and the treatment takes a few minutes. You can go home the same day.

Where treatments take place

Your treatment usually takes place in the colposcopy clinic, and you are normally awake when being treated.

In some situations, you will need to have treatment in an operating theatre in a hospital. Your colposcopist will discuss this with you.

If you expect your period when your treatment is due, please contact the colposcopy clinic to discuss your appointment.

You may wish to have a friend/partner/relative to meet you after the treatment.

Let's look at each treatment in turn, what they involve, aftercare, risks involved in treatments and how to reduce the risk of getting cervical cancer.

LLETZ treatment

LLETZ stands for large loop excision of the transformation zone. The transformation zone is an area at the opening of the cervix. It is the area where abnormal changes usually occur.

LLETZ is sometimes called loop diathermy, loop cone, loop biopsy or loop excision. All of these terms mean the same thing.

In a LLETZ procedure, a heated wire loop removes the abnormal cells from the transformation zone.

In a small number of cases, a needle may be used to remove the cells instead of a loop. This is called NETZ. NETZ stands for needle excision of the transformation zone.

What happens during a LLETZ (loop diathermy) treatment

1. The colposcopist injects a local anaesthetic into your cervix to numb it during treatment.
2. Abnormal cells are removed with the heated loop.
3. A biopsy is taken and sent to a laboratory for a closer look under a microscope.

You may notice a burning smell during this procedure. This is normal.

Symptoms after LLETZ

After a LLETZ treatment, you may have light bleeding or a brown discharge. This will usually last for a few days, but some blood spotting may last for 4 to 6 weeks.

Your LLETZ biopsy results

Around 4 weeks after your treatment, you and the doctor that referred you to the colposcopy unit will get a letter with your results and your next recommended step.

If we need to discuss your results with other healthcare professionals, your results may take more than 4 weeks.

Cold coagulation treatment

Cold coagulation is sometimes called ablative therapy or thermal ablation. All of these terms mean the same thing.

In a cold coagulation treatment, a heated instrument is applied to abnormal cells on the cervix to destroy them.

What happens during a cold coagulation treatment

1. The colposcopist usually injects a local anaesthetic into your cervix to numb it during the treatment.
2. Abnormal cells are destroyed with a heated instrument.
3. There is no biopsy taken during a cold coagulation treatment.

You may feel period-like discomfort/pain during this treatment. The discomfort/pain may last for about 1 to 2 minutes.

Symptoms after cold coagulation

There will usually be discharge with a slight odour from your vagina for 2 weeks after the procedure. Do not worry if you do not have any discharge or if the discharge continues slightly longer than 4 weeks. Everyone's cervix heals differently.

Cold coagulation results

There is no biopsy to send to a laboratory, so there are no results to review.

Looking after yourself following LLETZ or cold coagulation treatment

You can go home as soon as your treatment is complete. Most people feel well enough to return to work and carry out normal activities the next day.

It takes up to 6 weeks for your cervix to heal.

Infection risk

Like most medical procedures there is a risk of infection after these treatments.

However, to reduce the risk of infection:

- It is important you do not use tampons for 4 weeks – please use sanitary pads instead and change them regularly
- It is important you do not have sex for 4 weeks
- It is important you do not take a bath for 2 weeks – please have a shower instead
- It is important you do not swim or use a jacuzzi for 2 weeks or until any bleeding has stopped.

Follow-up colposcopy

If you need a further colposcopy we will let you know on the day or by writing to you.

Further screening

You will need a screening test 6 to 9 months after treatment. The results of this screening test will determine your next recommended step.

Risks and side effects from colposcopy treatments

Colposcopy is a safe procedure. However some treatments carry a small risk.

Risks immediately after treatment

Infection

An infection can occur after LLETZ or cold coagulation treatment. The signs of infection are:

- a bad smell
- yellow or green discharge
- feeling feverish (flushed cheeks, tiredness and warm to touch).

If you think that you may have an infection, it is best to call the colposcopy clinic or go to your GP (family doctor) for a prescription for an antibiotic.

Heavy bleeding

In rare cases after LLETZ treatment you may have bleeding that is heavier than a heavy period. If this does happen, you need to go to the nearest gynaecology department in a hospital for a simple but urgent treatment.

For out-of-hour emergencies please contact your GP (family doctor) or emergency department.

Pain or cramping

If you have pain or cramping, you can take pain medication such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. If the pain or cramping continues, or if pain medication does not help, please contact your GP (family doctor).

Long-term risks

Long-term risks from LLETZ and cold coagulation are very rare, but it is important for you to know about them.

Premature birth or late miscarriage

There is a small risk of premature birth or late miscarriage in people who have had LLETZ.

There is no risk of either of these with cold coagulation.

The risk is more likely if you have:

- more than one LLETZ treatment or
- more than 1cm of your cervix removed.

Most LLETZ treatments remove less than 1cm of your cervix.

Cervical stenosis

There is a small risk that the opening of the cervix can narrow or close after LLETZ or cold coagulation. This is called cervical stenosis.

The risk of cervical stenosis is higher if you have:

- been through the menopause
- had more than one colposcopy treatment.

Cervical stenosis can make it more difficult for you to have your screening test, and you might have to be screened in a colposcopy unit. However, this depends on local arrangements.

You may not have any obvious symptoms with cervical stenosis but it can cause:

- painful periods
- slow labour during birth.

If you have a concern about the information above, please contact your colposcopy clinic or your GP (family doctor) for more information.

Pregnancy following treatment

Your ability to become pregnant is not affected by the LLETZ or cold coagulation treatments.

However it is important if you become pregnant in the future that you tell your doctor or midwife that you have had LLETZ treatment. They may recommend that you have a scan of your cervix length during your pregnancy and advise you if you need any additional care.

Benefits of having treatment

Having a colposcopy treatment can remove abnormal cells that could result in cervical cancer.

Limitations of having treatment

Some women may need more than one treatment to remove abnormal cells. This means it is important to attend for any follow-up appointments.

How to reduce your risk of cervical cancer

You can go for screening

It is important you go for routine cervical screening when you are invited by CervicalCheck. It's one of the best ways to protect you from developing cervical cancer so please do not delay having a cervical screening test every time it's due.

You can quit smoking

If you smoke, quitting will reduce your risk of developing cervical cancer. Smoking weakens your immune system and leaves you more susceptible to the HPV infections that cause most cell changes in the cervix. Smokers are twice as likely to develop cervical cancer as non-smokers.

If you want support to stop smoking, your colposcopy clinic may be able to refer you to a smoking cessation officer. Or you can visit QUIT.ie.

Communicating with you

We will communicate with you in an open, honest, timely and transparent manner if:

- something goes wrong with your care
- you experience harm as a result of your care
- we think that harm may have occurred.

This means that we will keep you fully informed of the facts and details related to your participation in the cervical screening programme.

If you have any further queries or concerns please contact the colposcopy clinic. For out-of-hour emergencies please contact your GP (family doctor) or emergency department.

Feedback and contact information

We welcome your feedback.

Email: info@cervicalcheck.ie

Freephone: 1800 45 45 55

Website: hse.ie/cervicalcheck

Post: CervicalCheck, Freepost LK407, Limerick



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

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