

## Colposcopy

Answering your questions about HPV results and Colposcopy

**If you recently had an abnormal Pap test result or if high-risk HPV types 16 and/or 18 were found, a health care provider may recommend a colposcopy.**

### What is colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure that looks at any abnormal areas on your cervix and vagina. A specialist (colposcopist) will use a magnifying tool called a colposcope, which looks like a pair of binoculars on a stand. A colposcope allows the specialist to get a close-up look at your cervix.

*A colposcopy gets to the root cause of any abnormal cervical cells—making early treatment possible.*

### Who needs a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is usually recommended if:

- Your Pap test or cervix self-screening sample found a high-risk type of human papillomavirus (HPV)—HPV 16 and/or 18. Or you have an HPV infection that hasn't gone away.
- Your Pap test found cells on your cervix that don't look normal, likely caused by high-risk HPV.
- You experience symptoms, like bleeding between periods or pain during sex.
- You have a history of abnormal screening results.

### How should I prepare for my colposcopy?

- Try to schedule it when you're not on your period.
- Bring a support person with you.
- The procedure doesn't require a hospital stay, sedation, freezing or pain medication.
- Bring a list of questions to help you remember everything you want to ask.
- Talk to a primary care provider before your appointment.

### What happens during my colposcopy?

1. A specialist uses a speculum to gently spread your vaginal walls.
2. Your cervix is viewed through a colposcope. The colposcope doesn't enter your body.
3. Vinegar or iodine solution may be applied to your cervix. This makes any abnormal cells easier to see.
4. If the specialist sees any abnormal cells, they may take a small sample of tissue (biopsy). Exam is done in 5-10 minutes.

It's common to feel anxious about the procedure. Knowing what to expect can help you feel more comfortable. Remember, you can ask the specialist to explain what they're doing at any time.

See a video about the colposcopy procedure:  
[screeningbc.ca/cervix](https://www.screeningbc.ca/cervix)

### What happens after the colposcopy?

You can go about your normal activities afterward. If a biopsy was taken, you might experience mild spotting for 1 to 2 days. If a tampon was used to prevent spotting, make sure it's removed 3 hours after insertion. If spotting continues, you can use another tampon or pad as needed.

### Is colposcopy painful?

If a biopsy is taken, you may feel a pinch or have some cramping, but it should go away quickly. If you're nervous about the pain or feel pain during the procedure, let the specialist know. They will do their best to make you more comfortable or stop the procedure if you say so.

## What are the risks of colposcopy?

The risk of complications from colposcopy are small. In rare cases, a biopsy can cause an infection or bleeding. There's a small chance it can miss abnormalities.

## What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus that spreads through sexual contact. This includes intimate touching, oral, vaginal and anal sex.

There are more than 200 different types of HPV, many of which are harmless. But, a long-term infection with high-risk types, like HPV 16 and 18, can lead to cervical cancer. HPV types 16 and 18 cause about 70 out of 100 cases of cervical cancer.

## How did I get HPV?

If you've had any kind of sexual contact in your life, even with one partner, there's a good chance that you've come into contact with HPV. It can appear soon after exposure or years later, making it hard to know when HPV was passed or by whom.

## Does this mean I have cervical cancer?

No, these results are common. Very few people with an abnormal Pap test result or high-risk HPV have cancer or pre-cancerous cells. But, it's important to go to any follow-up appointments recommended for you. Attending appointments can prevent cervical cancer from developing.

## Should I tell my partner(s) I have HPV?

It's your choice whether or not you tell them. HPV is very common and most people who are sexually active will get HPV at some point in their life.

There is no treatment for the HPV infection itself. Most of the time, HPV goes away on its own without any symptoms or complications.

## Should my partner(s) get screened?

Anyone with a cervix and who are between the ages of 25 and 69 should screen regularly for cervical cancer.

If your partner(s) doesn't have a cervix, there is no need to check for HPV as they cannot get cervical cancer.

## How can I prevent HPV?

- ① **HPV vaccine:** getting the vaccine can help prevent the most serious types of HPV infections. Visit [immunizebc.ca/hpv](https://immunizebc.ca/hpv).
- ② **Use condoms:** although condoms don't completely prevent you from getting HPV, they help lower your risk. They also protect against other sexually transmitted infections.
- ③ **Don't smoke:** smoking may hurt the body's ability to fight off HPV and other infections.

## Contact Us

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