Colposcopy and abnormal screening in pregnancy

Abnormal screening results are sometimes found during pregnancy. Colposcopy is safe while you are pregnant, and its main purpose is to make sure there is no cancer. Treatment, if needed, is usually delayed until after the birth.

KEY POINTS

- Cervical screening is safe in pregnancy, including self-collection.
- Colposcopy is safe in pregnancy and does not harm your baby.
- A biopsy is taken only if needed, mainly to rule out cancer.
- Treatment for precancerous changes is usually delayed until after the birth.
- Changes often improve after the birth. I will check again then.

Why colposcopy should not wait

If your screening result recommends colposcopy, please do not delay it because you are pregnant. Colposcopy rules out cancer, confirms whether precancerous changes are present, and gives you reassurance that it is safe to continue your pregnancy as planned.

What is different in pregnancy

- The cervix is larger and softer, with a richer blood supply. It may bleed a little more after the speculum or a biopsy.
- A biopsy is taken only if an area looks like it could be more than a precancerous change.
- Samples are not taken from inside the cervical canal.
- Depending on what is seen, I may recommend another colposcopy later in the pregnancy.

DURING PREGNANCY	IF CHANGES ARE SEEN	6 TO 12 WEEKS AFTER PREGNANCY	IF STILL NEEDED
Colposcopy	**Monitoring**	**Colposcopy again**	**Treatment**
To rule out cancer. A biopsy only if needed.	Sometimes a repeat colposcopy later in pregnancy.	Many changes improve after the birth.	Usually LLETZ, planned with you.

Figure 1. The usual plan when precancerous changes are found in pregnancy. Simplified; your plan may differ.

Your birth

Precancerous changes, or a biopsy in pregnancy, do not usually change how you give birth. Your birth plan is based on your pregnancy and your preferences, as usual.

If you have had treatment before

If you have had LLETZ or a cone biopsy in the past, please let me know. Treatment to the cervix slightly increases the chance of preterm birth, mainly after larger or repeated treatments. We can discuss whether extra monitoring is needed during your pregnancy.

Common questions

Is a biopsy safe for my baby?
Yes. A biopsy is taken from the surface of the cervix and does not affect the pregnancy.

I am due for screening. Should I wait until after the birth?
No. The test is safe in pregnancy, and you can collect your own sample.

Will treatment be needed after the birth?
Not always. Changes often improve after the birth, so I will check again before recommending treatment.

Can I have sex after a biopsy?
It is best to wait until any spotting has settled, usually a day or two.

Is bleeding afterwards normal?
Light spotting for a day or two is common. Contact me, or your birth suite from 20 weeks, if it is heavier.

Can I have the HPV vaccine while pregnant?
The vaccine is not recommended during pregnancy. It can be given after the birth, including while breastfeeding.

Can colposcopy cause a miscarriage or early labour?
No. Colposcopy, and a biopsy if needed, do not cause miscarriage or early labour.

What if the biopsy shows something more serious?
This is uncommon. If it happens, I will arrange prompt review with a gynaecological oncologist, and we will plan your care together.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What did my screening test show?
- Will I need another colposcopy during this pregnancy?
- When should I have my check after the birth?

When to seek help

After colposcopy in pregnancy, contact me before 20 weeks, or your birth suite from 20 weeks, if you have bleeding heavier than spotting, abdominal pain or cramping, fluid leaking from the vagina, or a change in your baby's movements. In an emergency, call 000.

Rooms	03 8400 6193 — appointments and non-urgent questions, business hours
Urgent, after hours	Dr James Aridas, 0459 706 061 — urgent gynaecology concerns, and pregnancy concerns before 20 weeks
From 20 weeks pregnant	The birth suite at your booked hospital: Epworth Freemasons 03 9483 3833 · Cabrini Malvern 03 9508 6000 · Jessie McPherson 03 9594 2776
Emergency	Call 000 or go to your nearest emergency department

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

1. Cancer Council Australia. National Cervical Screening Program Guidelines, updated April 2025. cancer.org.au/health-professionals/clinical-practice-guidelines/cervical-cancer-screening
2. Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. National Cervical Screening Program: a summary guide for healthcare providers, February 2025. health.gov.au/ncsp
3. Australian Centre for the Prevention of Cervical Cancer. The renewed National Cervical Screening Program: quick reference guide, specific populations. acpcc.org.au
4. Australian Immunisation Handbook. Human papillomavirus (HPV). immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au
5. RANZCOG. Cervical screening in Australia (patient information pamphlet), version 3, 2025. ranzcog.edu.au
6. Healthdirect Australia. Colposcopy. healthdirect.gov.au/colposcopy
7. Cancer Council information and support: 13 11 20

This information is general and does not replace individual medical advice. If your circumstances differ from what is described here, please discuss them with Dr Aridas.

Version 1.0
October 2026 · Review 2028