

Vulval Rapid Access Clinic

Why Am I Attending Clinic Today?

Your doctor thinks you have an area on your vulva that he or she is concerned might be abnormal and could be a type of cancer.

What Is Vulval Cancer?

The vulva is the skin and fatty tissue between the upper thighs of women, from the area of the anus to about an inch below the pubic hairline.

Cancer of the vulva most often affects the two skin folds (or lips) around the vagina, known as the labia.

Vulval cancer is rare. If found early, it has a high cure rate of around 90%

Who Is Affected?

Vulval cancer can affect women of all ages but it more common in women aged 65 – 75. Vulval cancer may be related to genital warts, or a sexually transmitted disease caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

What Are the Signs of Vulval Cancer?

- Vulval itching that lasts more than a month
- A cut or sore on the vulva that won't heal
- A lump or mass on the vulva
- Vulval pain
- Bleeding from the vulva (different from your usual monthly bleeding)
- Prolonged burning or stinging sensation in the vulval area
- Any change in size, colour, or texture of a birthmark or mole in the vulval area

How Is Vulval Cancer Diagnosed?

If there is an abnormal area on the vulva, the doctor may take a biopsy. Firstly, local anaesthetic is injected to numb the area, then a small piece of skin is taken and sent to the laboratory where it is examined under a microscope.

What Are the Benefits of Having the Test?

This test will tell us whether you have a vulval skin condition or if you have cancer. A sample is taken in an outpatient setting using a local anaesthetic thereby avoiding general anaesthetic and admission to hospital.

What Are the Risks Associated with This Test?

Bleeding – occasionally you may have some bleeding from the area.

Pain – there will be some local discomfort or pain in the area and simple painkillers such as paracetamol can be taken.

Infection – you will be given advice on how to keep the area clean after the procedure, occasionally an infection can develop, if this does occur then it can be treated with antibiotics.

Failure to obtain a biopsy – occasionally we may not be able to obtain a biopsy – because it is too uncomfortable or for technical reasons.

What Alternative Do I Have?

A biopsy is the most appropriate way to confirm vulval cancer, as an alternative the biopsy can be taken during a general anaesthetic.

Will I Get My Biopsy Result Today?

No, the biopsy result will not be available for approximately 10 days.

What Will Happen Next?

Depending on the result of the biopsy we will either telephone or write to you to discuss it and arrange any further tests, appointments or operations for you. We will also write to your GP to keep him/her informed of our findings.

What If the Biopsy Is Normal?

You may be discharged, and no further follow-up arrangements will be required. Sometimes the biopsy shows there is a condition present called lichen sclerosis (please request the “Lichen Sclerosis” leaflet for more detailed information); it is treated with moisturising creams and strong steroids. Although this is a benign (non-cancerous) condition, it will require long-term monitoring, and this will be arranged for you at the hospital.

How Is Vulval Cancer Treated?

Vulval cancer is usually treated with surgery. The type of surgery depends on the size, depth, and spread of the cancer. Some people may also need radiation therapy.

If you have any queries or concerns, please phone:

Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust

Mon – Fri 9am to 4pm.

0151 702 4131 to speak to the Rapid Access Clinic Early Diagnosis Support Workers

Or speak to the nursing staff in the **Gynaecology Emergency Department** on **0151 702 4140**

Or telephone your GP.

Liverpool Women's is a smoke free site. Smoking is not allowed inside the hospital building, grounds, car parks or gardens. If you would like advice about stopping smoking, please ask a member of staff.

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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