

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Skin biopsy and curettage

Integrated Sexual Health



What is a skin biopsy?

A skin biopsy is the removal of a small sample of skin from the affected area for examination under the microscope. This is used to help make a diagnosis, or confirm a suspected diagnosis, or to rule out some serious conditions. Occasionally it is used to monitor progress of an existing condition.

There are two types of skin biopsy performed in Integrated Sexual Health:

- **Punch biopsy** – this involves removal of a small disc of skin by using a special instrument to cut out a small hole in the skin (most commonly 4 mm size).
- **Incision or excision biopsy** – this involves taking a larger section of skin using a scalpel (surgical knife). At times, the whole of the affected area of skin may be removed.

What does curettage mean?

Curettage is a way of removing lesions (abnormalities) on the surface of the skin by scraping them off with a sharp metal hoop called a curette or with the sharp edge of a wooden stick.

This procedure can also be used to remove a sample of the skin for histology (examination under the microscope).

Will I need an anaesthetic?

A local anaesthetic is used for most biopsies and occasionally for curettage.

This involves a small injection into the skin which may sting or burn at first, but will then make the area numb. You do not need to fast (not eat) for this procedure. Once you and your doctor are satisfied the area is numb, the biopsy can be performed. Serious problems with the use of a local anaesthetic are very rare.

Will I need any stitches?

Stitches may be needed following biopsy, but usually only one or two.

Stitches are not required following curettage.

Sometimes after biopsy or curettage, a special chemical (silver nitrate) may be used to seal the blood vessels.

What are the possible complications of biopsy or curettage?

It is uncommon to have problems after these procedures, but please be aware of the following:

- **Bleeding** during or after these types of procedure is usually very slight. It is stopped by using either pressure to the skin, stitches, or silver nitrate.
- **Pain** may be felt at the site of the procedure after the anaesthetic wears off, usually after an hour. If pain or discomfort is experienced, simple pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken.
- **Infection** is unusual. If an infection develops, you may notice an increase in pain or redness at the biopsy site, or notice pus in your wound.

Please contact the clinic or your GP surgery if this occurs, as you might need antibiotics.

- **Scarring.** Following biopsy or curettage, there will be a small scar which usually fades with time. Occasionally, in some individuals, the scar may become raised (called a keloid scar).

What should I do about my medications?

You should let the doctor/healthcare professional know about all the medications you are taking before the procedure.

What happens after the procedure?

The doctor/healthcare professional will discuss with you whether they plan to see you again in clinic with the results.

What do I do about aftercare?

It is important to keep the area dry and clean for 24 hours if possible. After this, the area may be washed gently. Occasionally wounds can ooze or bleed slightly. This should stop with the application of a clean dressing and gentle fingertip pressure for 10-15 minutes.

If the blood loss is heavy, or you are concerned you may have an infection, please do one of the following:

- Speak to a health advisor during clinic hours on telephone 01623 672260 (press option 4).
- Contact your family doctor.
- Attend your local Emergency Department (if out of hours).

Please keep this information to hand for future reference.

If you have any questions about this leaflet, or any concerns about the procedure, please raise these with the attending doctor/healthcare professional.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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