

Patient Information Leaflet

Cryotherapy

What is cryotherapy?

The term 'cryotherapy' means 'treatment using a low temperature' and refers to the removal of small, damaged areas of skin (lesions) by freezing them. A carefully controlled amount of cryotherapy treatment is applied to the affected area of skin. This has the effect of freezing the targeted area and destroying the lesion.

What conditions does cryotherapy treat?

In iCaSH, cryotherapy is used to remove viral warts on the genital skin caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV), or genital lesions caused by the virus Molluscum Contagiosum.

What happens during a cryotherapy appointment?

The cryotherapy treatment is applied carefully to the small defined areas of damaged skin using a spray gun for a few seconds (the exact duration will depend on the size and type of the lesion being treated). It feels cold, but as the pain is usually mild and short-lived most people find the discomfort quite bearable.

The frozen skin becomes white and takes 1-2 minutes to thaw back to normal skin temperature. Your clinician may suggest that the process be repeated once the skin has thawed.

Treatment is likely to produce a reaction similar to a burn. The skin may look red, swell, or blister. Redness may not be apparent in people with darker skin. After a few days, a scab will form, and this will take a few weeks to fall off depending on the site (occasionally a little longer, especially on the legs where healing is slow).

What are the possible side-effects of cryotherapy?

Side-effects do not necessarily affect every patient, but you should weigh up the possible side-effects with the intended benefits of treatment for you. If you have any concerns following your treatment, please contact your clinic for advice.

Immediate Side Effects

Pain	Pain associated with treatment is usually mild and short-lived. Painkillers (such as paracetamol) taken for the first 24 hours may relieve the discomfort; also taking a painkiller an hour or so prior to the anticipated treatment may reduce the discomfort.
Swelling and Redness	This is a normal immediate response to freezing the skin and usually settles after two to three days. For a short while the treated area may leak a little watery fluid.
Blistering	This is also common, and blisters settle after a few days as the scab forms. Some people blister more easily than others. Occasionally the blisters may become filled with blood; this is harmless.
Infection	Uncommonly, infection can occur, resulting in increased pain and pus; this may require an antiseptic cream or antibiotics from the healthcare practitioner who performed the treatment, or your GP.

Subsequent Side Effects

Scarring	Rarely you may be left with a pale mark or a flat white scar, regardless of your skin colour. Very rarely a raised scar can form following treatment with cryotherapy which appears as a rounded, hard growth on the skin. These are harmless lesions and are more common in darker-skinned individuals.
Changes to skin colouring (pigmentation)	The skin at and around the treatment site may lighten or darken in colour, especially in darker-skinned people. This usually improves with time but may be permanent.
Numbness	Occasionally treatment may result in numbness of the area of skin. Normal feeling usually returns within a matter of months.

After your appointment

1. Aim to keep the treated area(s) dry for 24 hours. You can then wash the area(s) gently and pat dry with a soft towel or tissue. A petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline®) can be applied daily to help the area heal and prevent crusting.
2. It is important not to 'pick' the scab as this will encourage scarring. A dressing or plaster is not usually necessary but may be advisable if the treated area is likely to be knocked or rubbed by clothing.
3. In most cases, the treated area will eventually look like normal skin, although scarring and changes in skin colour are possible, and rarely ulceration (broken down areas of skin), particularly on the lower legs.

In some cases, cryotherapy may need to be repeated if treatment is not effective.

For further information about this service, contact:

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