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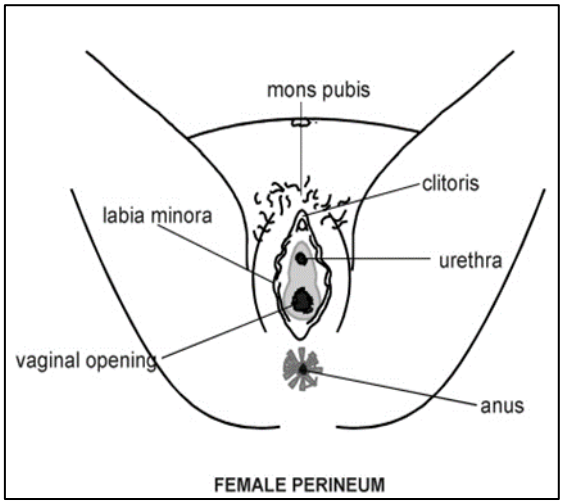
Vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN)

This leaflet is for women who have been diagnosed with vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN) and describes the options available for treatment. For any queries please contact the Colposcopy office on 0118 322 7283 with your details, and one of the doctors will be in touch with you.

What is vulva?

The vulva is the skin covered area of the female genitalia. It is made up of the area surrounding the vaginal and urethral opening which is called the vestibule, the labia minora (vaginal lips), clitoris, labia majora (skin area outside vaginal lips) and pubic area.



What is vulval intraepithelial neoplasia (VIN)?

This is a skin condition of the vulva. It is not cancer. However, it is classed as a pre-cancerous condition, as in some women VIN may develop into vulval cancer (after several years). What happens is that the cells of the skin of part, or several parts, of the vulva become abnormal and change in their appearance.

Vulval means affecting the vulva.

Intraepithelial means that the condition is limited to within the skin cells (epithelium is a medical word for the top layer of skin).

Neoplasia means abnormal growth or overproduction (proliferation) of cells.

What causes VIN?

VIN is seen in women of all age groups, but commonly seen in women in their 40s.The exact cause is not known, but following factors are associated with it:

- **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)** – There are several types of HPV but type 16 and 18 are most commonly associated with VIN. They can also cause abnormal cells in the cervix, anus and vagina.
- **Smoking** – VIN is more common in smokers.
- **Immunosuppression** – VIN is sometimes seen in women who are immunosuppressed, due to medical problems or on drugs causing immunosuppression.
- **Other skin disorders** – VIN is seen in women who are affected by a skin condition called lichen sclerosus or lichen planus. Usually, it is seen in older women above 60 and not associated with HPV.

What are the symptoms of VIN?

The symptoms do vary from woman to woman. Some have no symptoms and the area of VIN is noticed on a routine visit to the doctor. Other women complain of vulval pain or itching which can be quite severe. Others have painful sex and some women notice a lump or thickening of the vulval skin.

How is VIN diagnosed?

VIN is diagnosed by a vulval biopsy, where usually a small pea-sized amount of skin is removed from the affected area. The procedure is carried out under local anaesthetic. Please read the vulval biopsy leaflet on the Trust website for further information at https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/leaflets/vulval-biospy

What is the treatment for VIN?

- **Surgery:** Removal of the area has advantages and disadvantages. Removing the area will hopefully cure localised areas that could develop into cancer if left untreated. The disadvantages relate to having the surgery and recovery from the skin removal.
- **Topical (on the skin) cream treatment:** Imiquimod (Aldara) cream uses the immune system to attack the areas of VIN. This means it uses the body's natural defences to kill the pre-cancer cells in the skin. It does this by releasing a number of chemicals called cytokines. This cream is useful in those cases where VIN affects different sites on the vulva and skin area near the anus. Imiquimod is useful in women who have recurrence, in spite of multiple attempts of surgical excision.
- **Other treatment:** Ablation treatments are alternatives to surgery. Ablation means destroying the affected area. It can be done using a high-energy beam (laser) or a tiny electrical current passed through a probe (diathermy).

VIN and risk of cancer

In untreated VIN patients the risk of vulval cancer is around 15% (15 women in every 100). If VIN is treated, the subsequent risk of developing cancer is around 3-5% (3-5 women in every 100) so long term follow-up is important.

How to contact us

If you have any queries, please contact our Colposcopy Office on **0118 322 7283** Monday - Friday between 9am-4pm. Messages will be taken by the admin team and doctors will get in touch with you as soon as possible.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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