

Prenatal Testing

Information for patients

What is prenatal testing?

Prenatal testing is the genetic testing of the foetus during pregnancy.

Prenatal testing can be offered by either a chorionic villus sample (CVS) or by an amniocentesis.

Who should consider prenatal testing?

Couples who are at increased risk of having a child with a genetic condition.

Women who have an 'increased risk' screening result for Down syndrome or other trisomy.

What are the risks of having a prenatal test?

We know that sometimes the test can cause a miscarriage.

- Approximately 1 in every 200 (0.5%) women who have a CVS or an amniocentesis will miscarry as a result of the procedure.

Other than this, there is no evidence that prenatal testing is harmful to your baby as the test is carried out under ultrasound guidance.

When is prenatal testing carried out?

CVS is carried out around 11 weeks' of pregnancy.

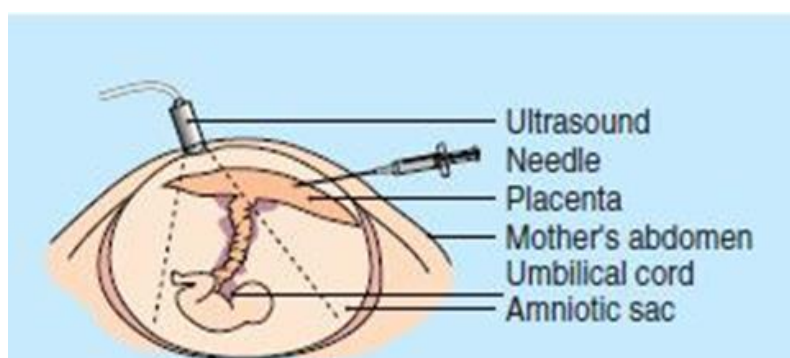
Amniocentesis is carried out around 16 weeks' of pregnancy.

How is the test performed?

The test involves taking a small amount of placental tissue (for a CVS) or amniotic fluid that surrounds the baby in the womb (for an amniocentesis). This contains cells from the baby that are tested in the laboratory. Before the test is performed, an ultrasound scan is carried out to confirm dates, and to check the position of both the baby and the placenta.

The abdomen is first cleaned with an antiseptic solution. Under ultrasound guidance, a fine needle is then passed into the womb, and a sample of the tissue or fluid is removed with a syringe and sent to the laboratory. Very occasionally, it is not possible to perform the test at the first appointment and you need to come back in 1-2 weeks' time. The test usually takes approximately 10-20 minutes.

Diagram of CVS testing



Is the prenatal test painful?

Most women say that the test is uncomfortable rather than painful and feels similar to 'period pain'.

What happens after the test?

We encourage you to bring a companion with you for support during and after the test. It is a good idea to take things easy for a couple of days, avoiding any heavy lifting or strenuous exercise. The 'period pain' feeling may persist for 24-48 hours. This should settle with Paracetamol, which is safe to take during pregnancy. If you have any other symptoms, such as leaking fluid or bleeding, or develop a high temperature, please contact your midwife.

When will the results be ready?

Your clinician will let you know how long the results might take.

Very occasionally (1-2% of cases) the results are not clear and the procedure might need to be repeated.

What if the results are abnormal?

If the results show anything abnormal, you would be told what the abnormality is and how this could affect your pregnancy. You would have the chance to discuss the result fully before making any decisions.

Further information

Your local genetics service:

South East of Scotland Clinical Genetic Services

MMC, Western General Hospital,
Crewe Rd South,
Edinburgh, EH4 2XU
Telephone: 0131 537 1116

Your local Fetal Medicine Unit:

The Simpson Centre for Reproductive Health
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh
51 Little France Crescent
Edinburgh
EH16 4SA