

Guidance on the management of pregnancy remains (up to 23+6 weeks)

Information for patients and staff

This leaflet explains what happens to your pregnancy remains when you lose your pregnancy up to 23+6 weeks gestation and the choices available to you. Please accept our sympathies at this difficult time – we are here to support you as much as possible. Please do not hesitate to speak to your nurse or doctor if you have any questions.

www.kch.nhs.uk

King's policy states that all pregnancy remains should be treated and managed by our hospitals in a lawful and respectful way. This will be done on our wards, in the histopathology department and in the mortuary.

For miscarriages under 16 weeks, histopathological examination is recommended to check for molar pregnancies. For ectopic pregnancies, histopathological examination is recommended to confirm the diagnosis and make sure that no further follow up is needed.

Histopathological examination is not usually required where a termination of pregnancy has occurred or for miscarriages over 16 weeks, unless specifically advised by your doctor.

What are my options for my pregnancy remains?

There are three general choices:

- Hospital arranged communal cremation – this is our standard practice and what most people choose. It is also what we will arrange if you don't advise us you will be making alternative arrangements.
- Collection of your pregnancy remains from the mortuary:
 - by a funeral director
 - by a named individual (yourself, a family member or a friend)
- Taking your pregnancy remains away with you, directly from the hospital ward. This is only available if histopathological examination is not being performed; either because it is not recommended or you are choosing not to have it performed.

What is a histopathological examination?

It is a type of examination done by a pathologist, who looks at the pregnancy tissue under a microscope.

A small sample of pregnancy tissue is embedded in a wax block (approximately 1cm in size) and then thinly sliced and placed within a glass slide to be examined under the microscope.

Why is this done?

We do this to confirm the presence of pregnancy tissue and to check for molar changes.

What is a molar pregnancy?

Molar pregnancy is a rare disorder where the placenta overgrows. Even more rarely, residual cells within the womb can keep growing even after your pregnancy is over. If you have this type of miscarriage, we will refer you to the specialist unit at Charing Cross Hospital for follow up.

Will I be given the results?

We will contact you only if no pregnancy tissue is identified or if the tissue shows molar changes. It usually takes two to three weeks for us to receive the results.

What happens after the histopathological examination?

The majority of the pregnancy remains, which have not been embedded in the wax block, are sent to the hospital mortuary. The mortuary then manages the remains in a lawful and respectful way according to hospital policy or as per your wishes.

The wax blocks and glass slides which contain a very small amount of pregnancy tissue are retained by the laboratory according to our policies. If you wish for these to be returned to the mortuary and reunited with the remainder of your pregnancy remains this can be arranged.

Very occasionally, when there is very little pregnancy tissue available for examination, it is all contained in the wax block and none is sent to the mortuary.

You have three choices regarding the management of your pregnancy remains following histopathological examination:

1. Hospital arranged communal cremation (most people chose this option)

The chosen method of treatment by the Trust is communal cremation. This is arranged by the mortuary and takes place at Eltham crematorium. Your pregnancy remains are placed in an individual box and taken to the crematorium with care along with the pregnancy remains from other patients, also in their own individual box. Although a number of boxes will be transported and cremated together, please be reassured each one is handled with respect and dignity.

It is not possible to attend the service, but the mortuary will be able to let you know the date and time it is occurring should you wish to know. Ashes from communal cremations are not individually identifiable and cannot be returned to you. The communal ashes will be scattered within the garden of remembrance at Eltham crematorium. It is possible to visit the garden should you wish to.

2. Collection of your pregnancy remains from the mortuary by a funeral director

You may wish to make your own arrangements for a private service, burial or cremation. If you wish, you can contact a funeral director to arrange this for you. If you would like some specialist help with the service, for instance from a community faith leader or a Humanist advisor, the funeral director should be able to provide you with relevant contact details. You can also contact a cemetery or crematorium directly.

There may be a cost to you for a service, burial or cremation, but this need not be expensive. Many funeral directors do not charge for their services in these situations, so it may be worth approaching a number of funeral directors for information about their costs and what services they offer.

3. Collection of your pregnancy remains by you, a family member or friend

You can take your pregnancy remains out of the hospital yourself, or ask a family member or friend to do this for you.

The pregnancy remains are placed in a container which is opaque (you cannot see through it). It is important to make you aware that, because of the fragility of pregnancy remains, they may not be identifiable by sight. On collection, the staff caring for you will ask you to sign a form taking responsibility for the remains. We advise you not to open the box containing the remains and to take care with how they are buried, following our guidance below.

You may wish to bury the pregnancy remains in your own garden or in another place that has special meaning to you. There are also a number of woodland or natural burial sites available (see details overleaf for the Natural Death Centre). If you do wish to bury your pregnancy remains on private land, it is important that you read the following:

- You must have permission from the owner of the land for the burial.
- You must ensure that the burial does not interfere with any rights that others may have over the land (for example, the mortgage company, in regard to resale of the property, or the council if the property is in a conservation area). It may be a good idea to contact the relevant authority or company for advice.
- You must ensure that there is no danger to others, for example, through pollution of water or by contamination of neighbouring land by natural decomposition of the remains.
- You must ensure the pregnancy remains are buried at an appropriate depth (at least 18 inches or 45cm). The local Environmental Health department or the Environment Agency can provide more detailed advice about this.

If you intend to bury your pregnancy remains in your garden, you should also consider how you will feel if you move house or if the land is used for a new purpose.

How long do I have to decide?

We will ask you to complete a form stating your wishes soon after the loss or before any surgical treatment. If you are not sure of your wishes do not worry, the hospital mortuary can keep your pregnancy remains for up to 30 days from the date of the loss or surgery. Please let the team looking after you know as soon as possible if you are planning to collect your pregnancy remains. You can tell them in advance, if you know what you would like, or up to 30 days after your procedure, if you are not sure.

Who can I talk to about collecting my pregnancy remains?

Deciding what to do with your pregnancy remains can be a stressful and upsetting time. Please contact the nursing team who are looking after you if you need any support or advice.

Useful numbers:

King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill:

Early Pregnancy Unit Tel: 020 3299 3168

Women's Surgical Unit Tel: 020 3299 5936
Gynaecology inpatients

Denmark Hill Clinic Tel: 020 3299 5040
Termination of Pregnancy Service
Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 12.30pm

Princess Royal University Hospital:

Early Pregnancy Unit Tel: 01689 863571

Surgical Ward 8 Tel: 01689 864132
Gynaecology inpatients

Useful organisations:

Miscarriage Association
www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk
Helpline: 01924 200799

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust
www.ectopic.org.uk
Helpline: 020 7733 2653

British Humanist association
www.humanism.org.uk
Tel: 020 7079 3580

Environment Agency
www.environment-agency.gov.uk
Tel: 0870 850 6506

National Association of Funeral Directors
www.nafd.org.uk
Tel: 0845 230 1343

Natural Death Centre
www.naturaldeath.org.uk
Tel: 0871 288 2098

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.