

Pregnancy of an unknown location

Information for patients and their partners

This leaflet answers some of the questions you may have about pregnancies outside of the womb. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the doctors or nurses caring for you.

www.kch.nhs.uk

What is pregnancy of an unknown location?

A pregnancy of unknown location means that we cannot see your pregnancy on a transvaginal ultrasound, even though you have had a positive urine pregnancy test.

There are four reasons why we cannot see your pregnancy:

1) You may have a very early normal pregnancy in your womb which is too small for us to see on your scan.

There is a window of about a week between the urine test turning positive and it being possible to see signs of an early pregnancy on a transvaginal ultrasound scan. This is most likely to be the reason if you have not had any vaginal bleeding and you are not sure of the date of your last period or the length of your cycle. We usually see a pregnancy sac on a scan by about a week after you miss a period and a heartbeat about a week later if all is well.

2) Your pregnancy may be growing in your womb but not at the normal rate because it is going to miscarry.

There is no specific time by which we expect to see your pregnancy on a scan if you are going to have a miscarriage.

3) You may have an ectopic pregnancy, where the pregnancy grows outside of your womb. This is different in each woman.

There is no specific time or hormone level that tells us when we should be able to see an ectopic pregnancy on a scan.

4) You may have already had a miscarriage during period-like or heavy vaginal bleeding and the pregnancy has already been passed.

What other tests will I have?

To help us work out what is most likely to have happened, we will take a sample of your blood to measure two hormones: hCG (human chorionic gonadotrophin) and progesterone.

The level of hCG tells us how much pregnancy tissue you have or have had in your body, and the level of progesterone tells us how quickly it is growing. We will give you the test results over the phone, either later that afternoon or the following morning, depending on when we took your blood sample.

These tests do not tell us where your pregnancy is but they do help us to decide if and when you need to come back for routine checks.

There are a number of common possible patterns of results:

Low hCG and high progesterone: This shows a small, very early and pregnancy that is growing quickly. We expect to be able to see signs of a normal pregnancy in your womb once your hCG level is above 1,000-1500, so we will usually advise you to come back for another scan to check the location of your pregnancy when we predict that it will have reached this level. The hCG level should double every 48 hours.

Mid-level progesterone: In 70% of cases this is due to a miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy, with a 30% chance of a normal pregnancy. Blood tests cannot tell the difference between an ectopic pregnancy and a pregnancy that will end as a miscarriage. The hCG level varies in both but the progesterone level is usually quite low. If you get this result, we will ask you to have the test for hCG again in 48 hours.

After this second hCG test, if the level is:

- rising, we will scan you again to try to locate your pregnancy
- the same or going down, it is likely that you are having a very early miscarriage. We will do blood tests to keep checking your hCG level until it falls below 20. In this case, we will probably never know where the pregnancy was. You are likely to have vaginal bleeding but this is nothing to worry about.

Because we still have not been able to confirm where the pregnancy is, if you have any severe pain – even if your hCG levels are falling – please come back to the Early Pregnancy Unit or go to your local Emergency Department (A&E). You may have an ectopic pregnancy that we have not been able to see. This can burst and cause internal bleeding, although this is rare if you have a low level of hCG. So we advise you to avoid travel and stay in London until we can exclude an ectopic pregnancy.

Very low progesterone: If you have bleeding and we cannot find the location of your pregnancy, it is unlikely that it will be normal. Very low progesterone shows that the pregnancy is very unlikely to be growing or developing – whether it is implanted in the cavity of the womb

or outside it. It is likely that you have had – or will have – a miscarriage and we do not need to keep monitoring you routinely. We will ask you to take a pregnancy test in a week or two. If it is negative, you will not need any more check-ups with us. If it is positive, you will have another hCG blood test.

You are likely to be having a miscarriage, so you should expect to have some vaginal bleeding. If you have any severe pain, please come back to the Early Pregnancy Unit or go to your local A&E so we can check again for an ectopic pregnancy. If you have vaginal bleeding that does not settle within two weeks, or you have a fever or feel unwell, also come back to the Early Pregnancy Unit.

When can we try for a baby again?

We advise you wait until after your next period before trying again as it makes it easier to work out your due date. If you get pregnant before your first period, it should not increase your risk of a miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy, but it may make early diagnosis more difficult.

Some women may need more time to recover – emotionally and physically. Start again when you and your partner feel ready.

Where can we get help and emotional support?

You and your partner may have different emotions if you miscarry or have an ectopic pregnancy. Grieving and depression are common and it can take time to get over these feelings.

You may feel that you need help to come to terms with your loss. Our nurses can help you: they can advise you, give you information or arrange for you and your partner to have psychotherapy.

Please contact us on the number below if you need support or you would like us to refer you.

Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

If you have any queries or concerns during normal working hours, please call the Early Pregnancy Unit:

Denmark Hill site, 9.30am-5pm, Monday to Friday

Tel **020 3299 3168**

Princess Royal University Hospital site, 9am-4pm, Monday to Friday

Tel **01689 865721**

Where can I get more information?

The Miscarriage Association

Helpline: 01924 200799

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust

Helpline: 020 7733 2653

www.ectopic.org.uk

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.pals@nhs.net**

You can also contact us by using our online form at **www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals**

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

Tel: **01689 863252** Email: **kch-tr.palskent@nhs.net**

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