

Fetal heart scans

Information for patients

This information sheet explains what happens when you come to the Harris Birthright Centre for a fetal heart scan. If you have any queries, do not hesitate to speak to one of the midwives.

Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name and date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.
Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

What is a fetal heart scan?

The scan allows us to examine the main structure of your baby's heart to see if it has developed correctly. It is similar to a routine ultrasound scan (across your stomach) that we do during pregnancy but we only focus on examining your baby's heart. It is important you realise that we may find a problem with your baby's heart.

The fetal cardiology team are trained in heart examinations and cannot give you an opinion on the sex of the baby or other parts of the body.

Why do I need the scan?

You have been referred to us for a detailed fetal heart scan. Your hospital doctor will have discussed this with you, but if you are not sure, we can discuss this with you again.

We do fetal heart scans because some major heart problems can be treated during pregnancy or need treatment immediately after birth. This allows us to make arrangements for your baby so that they have the best care after birth. This also means you can make informed choices about how you wish to proceed.

Ultrasound is a safe test to have during pregnancy.

What happens before the scan?

We will ask you to lie back on an examination bed and be bare across your tummy. We will put ultrasound gel on your tummy to do the scan. If you feel uncomfortable during the scan please let the doctor know and they will adjust your position.

What happens during the scan?

The operator may be silent as they need to concentrate on the scan to check all your baby's heart structures.

Another doctor may be called into the room for help. There may be a technical difficulty so it does not necessarily mean there is something wrong with your baby's heart. The doctors sometimes speak to each other to offer technical advice on the scan. Once the scan is finished, one of the doctors will explain the result to you. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions.

This is a major teaching hospital, so other doctors may be present to observe your scan. Please let us know when you check in with the receptionist if you would prefer not to have observers present.

How long does the scan take?

Up to 30 minutes.

Heart problems that can be detected

The scan allows us to examine the main structure of your baby's heart to see if it has formed correctly or not. We can find most (but not all) forms of major heart defects including:

- abnormally formed or connected heart chambers, valves and major arteries
- large holes in the heart
- severe heart problems, such as obstructions of the two main arteries arising from the heart
- problems with heart rhythm
- problems with heart function (ability of the heart to pump blood effectively).

Occasionally, we find minor problems which may not cause any significant problems for your baby.

Some heart problems suggest that there may be abnormalities in other parts of the body, or an underlying genetic problem. If this is the case, we would suggest that you see the fetal medicine team for a further assessment.

Heart problems that cannot be detected

Not all heart conditions can be detected before birth. Even though your baby's heart may appear normal when you have the scan, some problems can only be diagnosed after birth.

Before birth, it is normal for a fetus to have a hole between the two collecting chambers in the heart and a connection between the lung artery and main body artery. Both of these usually close spontaneously after birth. Sometimes they do not close, but these are problems that cannot be diagnosed before birth. Small holes between the pumping chambers of the heart may be difficult to see before birth. Obstructions in the heart valves and vessels can develop during pregnancy or after birth, so when you have your scan, these problems may not be present yet.

If we see you when you are 12-18 weeks pregnant, it is likely that we will book a second scan for you at 20 weeks, even if your first scan is normal. This is because we can usually see the heart more clearly at 20 weeks and can more easily identify narrowed arteries and valves.

Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

If you have any questions about your results, please contact the specialist midwives on **020 3299 3246** (option 3).

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.

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. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road – staff will be happy to direct you.

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**

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

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