

Guidance on the management of pregnancy remains (under 16 weeks)

Information for patients

This leaflet explains what happens to your pregnancy remains when you lose your pregnancy before 16 weeks (up to 15 weeks and 6 days) gestation and the choices that are 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 the hospital in a lawful and respectful way. This will be done on our wards, in the histopathology department and in the mortuary.

Will there be any tests carried out on my pregnancy remains?

We sometimes need to carry out a histopathological examination of your pregnancy remains.

- For miscarriages under 16 weeks, the examination is recommended to check for a molar pregnancy. This is a rare disorder where your placenta overgrows. Even more rarely, cells left behind in your womb can keep growing 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.
- For ectopic pregnancies, the examination is recommended to confirm the diagnosis and make sure that no further follow up is needed.

What is a histopathological examination?

A pathologist looks at (examines) the pregnancy tissue under a microscope. They embed a small sample of pregnancy tissue in a 1cm-square wax block which they then slice thinly, place in a glass slide and look at under a microscope.

Why is this done?

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

Will I be given the results?

We will contact you only if the pathologist finds no pregnancy tissue or if the tissue shows molar changes. We usually get the results in two to three weeks.

What happens after the histopathological examination?

Most of the pregnancy remains are sent to the hospital mortuary. The mortuary manages the remains in a lawful and respectful way according to hospital policy or your wishes (see below for your options).

The wax blocks and glass slides, which contain a very small amount of pregnancy tissue, are kept by the laboratory in line with our policies. We can arrange for these to be returned to the mortuary and put with the remainder of your pregnancy remains if you wish. The wax blocks can be cremated but the glass slides can only be incinerated or buried. If incineration is chosen, this will be as part of our medical waste procedures.

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.

What are my options for my pregnancy remains?

There are three main choices:

1. Communal cremation arranged by King's.
2. Collection of your pregnancy remains from the mortuary:
 - a. by a funeral director
 - b. by a named individual (yourself, a family member or a friend).

You have 30 days to contact us before we arrange a communal cremation.
3. Taking your pregnancy remains away with you, directly from the hospital ward.

The following pages explain these options and the support we can offer you.

1 Communal cremation arranged by King's

Most people choose this option. It is also what we will arrange if you do not tell us are making alternative arrangements. You can attend a communal funeral service before the cremation, if you would like. The mortuary arranges it and it takes place at a local 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 boxes.

Although a number of boxes will be transported and cremated together, please be reassured each one is handled with respect and dignity.

We can inform you of the date and the time of the cremation, 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 in the crematorium garden, which you can visit.

2 Collection of your pregnancy remains from the mortuary:

a) by a funeral director

You may wish to make your own arrangements for a private service, burial or cremation. You can contact a funeral director to arrange this for you or a cemetery or crematorium directly.

If you would like specialist help with the service, such as from a community faith leader or a Humanist advisor, the funeral director should be able to provide you with relevant contact details.

There may be a charge 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 them for information about their costs and services.

b) by you, a family member or friend

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

We place the pregnancy remains in an opaque (non-see-through) container. Please be aware that you may not be able to identify the pregnancy remains by sight because they are very fragile. When the container is collected, the staff caring for you will ask you to sign a form taking responsibility for the remains. We advise you not to open the container and to take care with how your pregnancy remains are buried, following our guidance on page 4.

How long do I have to decide?

We will ask you to fill in a form stating your wishes, usually before you have any medical or surgical treatment. Do not worry if you are not sure what you want to do at this stage: 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 or up to 30 days after your procedure.

If you have asked us to keep your remains for you, you must let us know the progress of your arrangements at least once every 30 days. If we have not had confirmed contact from you for 30 days, we will make arrangements for a communal cremation as described on page 2.

We will freeze any remains held in the mortuary for more than 30 days while arrangements for their management are made. This is in line with Human Tissue Authority (HTA) guidelines.

3 Taking your pregnancy remains away with you, directly from the hospital ward

You may wish to take your pregnancy remains away with you, directly from the hospital ward. This is only possible when a trained member of staff is available to package the remains for you. If this is not available, you are always able to collect your remains from the mortuary at a later date.

This is only advisable if a histopathological examination is not being carried out – either because it is not recommended or you have chosen not to have it performed (histopathological examination is explained on page 2).

We place the pregnancy remains in an opaque (non-see-through) container. Please be aware that you may not be able to identify the pregnancy remains by sight because they are very fragile. When the container is collected, the staff caring for you will ask you to sign a form taking responsibility for the remains. We advise you not to open it and to take care with how your pregnancy remains are buried, following our guidance on this page, below.

Advice on burying your pregnancy remains

You may wish to bury your pregnancy remains in your own garden or in another place which has a special meaning to you. There are also woodland or natural burial sites (find out more information via the Natural Death Centre, see 'Useful organisations' on page 5). If you want 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 other people may have over the land (for example, mortgage company, with regards to resale of the property or relevant 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 water pollution or contamination of neighbouring land by natural decomposition of the remains.
- You must ensure your pregnancy remains are buried at an appropriate depth (at least 18in/45cm). Contact your local Environmental Health Department or the Environment Agency for more detailed advice (see 'Useful organisations' on page 5).

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

Who can I talk to about collecting my pregnancy remains?

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

Useful contacts

King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill

Early Pregnancy Unit

Tel: 020 3299 1456

Women's Surgical Unit

Tel: 020 3299 5936

Gynaecology inpatients

Princess Royal University Hospital

Early Pregnancy Unit

Tel: 01689 863571

Surgical Ward 8

Tel: 01689 864132

Gynaecology inpatients

Chaplaincy Service

Email: kch-tr.chaplains@nhs.net

King's College Hospital

Tel: 020 3299 3522

Princess Royal University Hospital

Tel: 01689 863912

Useful organisations

Miscarriage Association

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Helpline: 01924 200799

The Ectopic Pregnancy Trust

ectopic.org.uk/

Helpline: 020 7733 2653

British Humanist Association

humanists.uk/

Tel: 020 7324 3060

National Association of Funeral Directors

www.nafd.org.uk

Natural Death Centre

www.naturaldeath.org.uk

Tel: 01962 712690

Environment Agency

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency

Tel: 03708 506506

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the 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' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit www.kch.nhs.uk.

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. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.access@nhs.net