

Guidance on the management of pregnancy remains (under 24 weeks)

Information for patients of the Pregnancy Advisory Service

This leaflet explains what happens to your pregnancy remains if your pregnancy is ended before 24 weeks gestation (up to 23 weeks and 6 days) and the choices that are available to you. We understand these decisions can be difficult, so please do not hesitate to speak to your nurse, midwife 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.

What are my options for my pregnancy remains?

There are three main choices:

1. Communal cremation at a local crematorium 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 at a local crematorium, 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.

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.

Your clinical team can inform you of the date and 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 funeral directors for information about their costs and services.

b) by you, a family member or friend

You can arrange to collect 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 it and to take care with how your pregnancy remains are buried, following our guidance on the next page.

How long do I have to decide?

We will ask you to complete a form stating your wishes 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 when they are received.

If you choose communal creation arranged by King's and later change your mind, please contact the team caring for you straight away. Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee that the cremation will not have already happened, but we will do our best to meet your wishes.

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 above.

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 possible, you can 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 4).

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 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?

Please contact the Pregnancy Advisory Service nursing team for help with making the collection arrangements.

If you are unsure of what you want to do with your pregnancy remains or tell us that you are going to make private arrangements, a member of the team will contact you about one week after your procedure to confirm the arrangements.

Deciding what to do with your pregnancy remains can be difficult. Please contact the Pregnancy

Advice Service nursing team if you need any support or advice. If you were referred to King's College Hospital from BPAS, MSI or NUPAS, you can access these organisations' counselling services. Their contact numbers are listed on page 5, along with those for other helpful organisations.

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

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

This is not usually needed where you have had a termination of pregnancy, unless specifically advised by your doctor. It is more commonly performed where a miscarriage has occurred.

We may recommend a histopathological examination to look for molar changes if you are diagnosed with a miscarriage at your appointment. We do this only if you chose to have surgical management.

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.

We do this to confirm the presence of pregnancy tissue (in very early pregnancies) and to check for molar changes.

What is a molar pregnancy?

This is a rare disorder where the placenta overgrows. Even more rarely, cells left behind in your womb can keep growing after your pregnancy is over. If this has occurred, 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 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, which have not been embedded in the wax block, are sent to the hospital mortuary. The mortuary manages these remains in a lawful and respectful way according to hospital policy or your wishes (see page 1).

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.

Useful contacts

King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill

Pregnancy Advisory Service

Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 12.30pm

Tel: 020 3299 5040

Early Pregnancy Unit

Tel: 020 3299 3168

Women's Surgical Unit

Tel: 020 3299 5936

King's College Hospital Chaplaincy Service

Tel: 020 3299 3522

Email: kch-tr.chaplains@nhs.net

Useful organisations

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) MSI Reproductive Choices

www.BPAS.org

Helpline: 03457 304030

www.msichoice.org.uk

Helpline: 0345 300 8090

**National Unplanned Pregnancy
Advisory Service (NUPAS)**

www.nupas.co.uk

Helpline: 0333 004 6666

Abortion Talk

www.abortiontalk.com/talk

Talkline: 03330 909266

Miscarriage Association

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Helpline: 01924 200799

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)

www.arc-uk.org

Helpline: 020 7713 7486

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.