

Chorionic Villus Sample Information Sheet

What is a Chorionic Villus Sample (CVS) or Chorionic Villus Biopsy (CVB)

Chorionic villus biopsy means obtaining a tiny piece of tissue from the afterbirth (placenta). CVS is a diagnostic test as it gives a definitive answer.

What information does it provide?

As the placenta and your baby both developed from the same fertilised egg then the genetic information in the placenta should be the same as in the baby. We can therefore check the chromosomes in the placenta and diagnose conditions such as Down syndrome or look for genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis. Please note that we only routinely check the chromosomes from a CVS unless we are looking for a specific genetic problem.

At what stage of the pregnancy can the test be done and how long do the results take

CVS can be carried out at any stage of pregnancy from 11 weeks onwards. The first result becomes available in 24-48 hours and will tell you whether or not your baby has a major chromosome problem. This result is accurate 98% of the time. A second more detailed analysis after 2-3 weeks looks for smaller and rarer chromosome conditions. This result is 99.9% reliable. This does mean that occasionally we will have to tell you that the long term culture has demonstrated a problem not seen on the initial result. Not all of these are significant findings but it usually means more tests will be required. If we are looking for a genetic condition we will advise you of how long the result might take. This can be between a day and 4 weeks.

How are the test done?

An ultrasound scan is placed on your tummy to check on the baby and to locate the position of the placenta (afterbirth). Assuming the placenta is in a good position we will then put some local anaesthetic into the skin, which will sting a little. Watching all the time on ultrasound a needle is then introduced through your tummy wall, through the uterus and into the placenta. You will feel a pushing sensation and it will feel a little sharp as the needle enters the womb (uterus). Once the needle is in the correct place a finer needle is introduced through the first and a syringe attached. By applying suction to the syringe we can aspirate tiny pieces of the placenta. This does not hurt although the sensation may feel a little strange. The sample is then sent to the laboratory for analysis.

How long does it take?

The test takes about 5 minutes. With the scan before and after and some discussion the whole consultation will last about 30 minutes

Are any precautions necessary afterwards?

Your abdomen will feel slightly sore for a few hours afterwards, however there are no particular precautions that you need to take. A simple painkiller like paracetamol can be taken if needed. We would advise that you do not drive yourself for a couple of hours after the procedure. This is purely as a precaution as we would not wish any tummy pain to distract you behind the wheel. The only thing you will have to show for the test is a small puncture wound from the needle on your tummy. This requires no special care and does not need to be kept dry so you can bath or shower as normal.

Do you know your blood group?

If you are Rhesus negative we need to know as you will need to be given an injection of Anti-D. This is because putting a needle into the placenta could cause a small amount of the baby's blood to enter your circulation

What are the risks?

It is important that you realise that the passage of even a fine needle into the pregnancy is associated with a small risk to the pregnancy, even if the procedure is straightforward. The main complications are miscarriage or rupture of the membranes of the sac the baby is in. The risk of causing a miscarriage with CVS, within 6 weeks of the procedure, is about 1 in 100. Occasionally some ladies have a little vaginal bleeding after the test. Anything more than spotting should be reported to your doctor or the hospital. It may feel bruised for a couple of days and you may feel some period like pains but you should not experience significant bleeding or contractions. Again if you do so you should contact your GP or the hospital

Consent

Many units will ask you to sign a consent form prior to the procedure. This is to document that you have been informed about the test and have agreed. Others will not ask you to sign as the test is carried out with you wide awake which implies that you are happy for the doctor to proceed.

Is there anything else I need to know?

Sometimes normal and abnormal sets of chromosomes are found in different cells of the same sample. This condition (mosaicism) is uncommon, occurring in about 1% of CVS tests. It can be difficult to work out exactly where the abnormal chromosomes have come from and usually further tests are required. If such a result occurred in your case this would be discussed with you by the person giving you the result.

How and when will I get my result?

we usually have a result on the next working day (providing the sample reaches the lab by 3pm on the day of the test). The person performing the procedure will take a contact number and will inform you when you will receive the phone call. You should provide us with a number where you can be contacted and are happy to take the call. If you are at work the next day and unhappy to take phone call then alternate arrangements can be made but we will not leave results on an answer phone.

The long term result is usually available after 2-3 weeks. If it is normal then we will send a standard letter through the post. This often takes 5-6 weeks from the test time to arrive. If there is a problem with the long term result we will phone you. Therefore if three weeks has passed and you have not heard from us you can assume that all is well.

If part of the sample has been sent for other tests we will inform you at the time how long it will take and how we will contact you.

How do you decide whether or not to have a test and which test to have?

It is very important to understand that CVS is capable of diagnosing many conditions but in practice will only diagnose those conditions we ask for. For the majority of women this test will just check their baby's chromosomes. For those with a risk of a genetic condition we will, if it is possible, also check for the genetic condition.

CVS has the advantage over amniocentesis in that it can be done earlier in the pregnancy; however that has to be balanced against the slightly higher risk of miscarriage. As with any test you as an individual or couple have to decide if the risks of miscarriage outweigh your need to find out if you baby has a specific condition and how that information would influence your pregnancy.

Audit

It is very important for our records that we audit the outcome of all pregnancies who have any invasive test (amniocentesis, CVS, fetal blood sampling) in pregnancy and as such we would be grateful if you would inform us of the outcome.

If you have any further queries or questions, please do not hesitate to let us know and we will be happy to discuss them with you.