

Maternity Department

Cystic Hygroma

This leaflet aims to help you understand more about Cystic Hygroma.

If you have recently had a scan indicating that your baby may have a cystic hygroma, you may have some questions about the condition. This leaflet hopes to address some of these questions and give you some information about the condition and what will happen next.

What is a cystic hygroma?

A cystic hygroma is an uncommon finding that is sometimes seen during the routine early pregnancy scan. It is suspected when fluid filled areas are seen under the skin around the baby's neck. The condition is thought to develop from a blockage in the baby's lymphatic system. This system is responsible for helping fight infections and removing excess fluid and waste from the body. The baby's lymphatic vessels normally drain into two large sacs in the baby's neck which eventually join up with the baby's blood vessels. If they fail to join up the fluid filled areas can get bigger in size.

Why has this happened?

A cystic hygroma can be an isolated finding which can disappear and cause no obvious problems with the baby, but it can also be something which is seen in babies that have chromosome abnormalities (for example Turner's syndrome) or other structural problems possibly involving the baby's heart. Chromosomes are the parts of cells that contain the genetic material from our parents.



What will happen now?

You will be referred to the hospital's Fetal Medicine Department. Please make sure that you have had all the routine blood tests that your community midwife requested before this appointment. The department is situated on the second floor of the hospital. At this appointment the consultant will perform an ultrasound scan in order to thoroughly examine your baby. If a diagnosis of cystic hygroma is confirmed, the doctor will explain what this means and go through the possible outcomes of the condition.

Possible tests involved

As a cystic hygroma is sometimes associated with chromosome problems in the baby, you will be offered a test to examine the baby's chromosomes. In early pregnancy this is done by Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS).

Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS)

This is a procedure in which a tiny sample of tissue is removed from the placenta (afterbirth) and sent to a cytogenetic laboratory for analysis. The results of this test are usually available within 3 to 4 working days. There is a 1% risk that the CVS could cause a miscarriage. If this were to happen, it would probably occur within 2 weeks of having the test. You will be given a full explanation of how CVS is performed if this test is recommended.

Infection screen

If the consultant thinks it is necessary, a sample of blood may be taken from you to screen for viral infections, as you may have unknowingly contracted an infection during your early pregnancy which may be a cause of the extra fluid seen around your baby.

What does this mean for my baby?

If the results of the tests performed show that the baby's chromosomes are normal, you will have regular scans to monitor your baby's condition and to check if the baby is developing normally. The consultant will want to see if the cystic hygroma is getting worse or is improving.

Patient Information

If the results of your CVS show that your baby has a chromosome abnormality, you may choose to continue with your pregnancy with support from the hospital team. However, you may choose to make the very difficult decision to terminate your pregnancy.

We understand that you will obviously be very worried following the identification of a problem with your baby. This information leaflet has attempted to answer some of the questions you may have at this time. As cystic hygroma can be a complex condition, with variable pregnancy outcomes, it is not possible to include every eventuality in this leaflet. Please be assured that the fetal medicine team will see you as soon as it is possible to do so and that they will support you at this difficult time.

Please contact us if you have any queries or concerns:

Fetal Medicine Department - Telephone: 024 7696 6572

Useful Website

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC) Tel: 020 7631 0280

www.arc-uk.org

Helpline 0845 077 2290 or 0207 713 7486 from a mobile phone

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC) provides impartial information and individual support to parents whether they are going through antenatal screening or whose unborn baby has been diagnosed with an abnormality.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6572 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

Document History

Department:	Maternity
Contact:	26572
Updated:	April 2022
Review:	April 2025
Version:	4
Reference:	HIC/LFT/1597/13