

Maternity

Cystic Hygroma

If you had a scan showing a cystic hygroma, you might have some questions. This leaflet explains what it is and what might happen next.

What is a cystic hygroma?

A cystic hygroma is a rare condition that is sometimes seen during an early pregnancy scan. It happens when fluid filled areas are seen under the skin around the baby's neck. This happens when there is a blockage in the baby's lymphatic system. This system helps fight infections and removing excess fluid and waste from the body. The baby's lymphatic vessels usually drain into 2 large sacs in the baby's neck which join with the baby's blood vessels. If they do not join up, the fluid filled areas can grow bigger.

Why does this happen?

Sometimes a cystic hygroma happens by itself and goes away without causing any problems. But other times, it can be seen in babies that have chromosome abnormalities (for example Turner's syndrome), or other structural problems involving the baby's heart. Chromosomes are the parts of cells that have the genetic material from the parents.

What will happen now?

You will be referred to the hospital's Fetal Medicine Department. The department is on the second floor of the hospital. Please make sure that you have had all the routine blood tests that your community midwife requested before this appointment. At this appointment, the consultant will do an ultrasound scan to examine your baby. If they find a cystic hygroma, the doctor will explain what this means and what might happen next.



Possible tests involved

A cystic hygroma can sometimes be linked to problems with a baby's chromosomes. You will be offered a test to check the baby's chromosomes. In early pregnancy Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS) does this.

Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS)

This is a test where a tiny sample of tissue is removed from the placenta (afterbirth) and sent to a cytogenetic laboratory to be tested. The results are usually available in 3 to 4 working days. There is a small risk (1 in 100) that the CVS could cause a miscarriage. If that happens, it usually happens within 2 weeks of the test. The doctor will explain how CVS works.

Infection screening

If the doctor thinks it is needed, you may have a blood test to check for viral infections. Some infections can happen in early pregnancy without you knowing, and they may cause the extra fluid found around your baby.

What does this mean for my baby?

If the tests show that your baby's chromosomes are normal, the doctor will keep checking the baby's growth and health with regular scans. They will also check to see if the cystic hygroma is getting better or worse.

If the results of your CVS show that your baby has a chromosome abnormality, you can talk to the hospital team about your options. You can choose to continue the pregnancy with support, or you might decide to end the pregnancy. This is a very personal and difficult decision, and the team will be there to help you.

We understand that this may be a worrying time. This leaflet was made to answer some of your questions. Because cystic hygroma can be complicated and each case is different, not everything can be explained here. But the fetal medicine team will see you as soon as possible and will be there to support you through everything.

Patient Information

If you have any questions or need help, please contact:

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) provide 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.

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