



Information for Patients

Chorion Villus Biopsy (CVB)

Both the baby and the placenta (afterbirth) develop from the same cell and so the chromosomes present in the cells of the placenta are the same as those of the baby. This means that we can use a small piece of tissue from the placenta (a chorion villus biopsy) if we want to check the chromosomes of the baby.

How is the CVB done?

There are two ways in which samples can be obtained:

- Usually the CVB is done by passing a fine needle through the mother's abdominal wall into the placenta. We watch the needle carefully on ultrasound scan all the time to ensure that it is correctly positioned in the placenta. The needle is then moved backwards and forwards to break off a tiny piece of placental tissue. The procedure only lasts for a few minutes. Sometimes we do not get an adequate sample at the first attempt and the needle needs to be inserted again.
- Occasionally the CVB is done by passing a fine flexible tube through the cervix (neck of the womb) into the placenta. Exactly the same sample is obtained. For some women this method is more appropriate than the first.

Does it hurt?

You will feel some discomfort. However the test only lasts a few minutes and most women cope quite easily.

What should I do after a CVB?

For the first day or two you may have some crampy pain, like mild period pain. You may find it helpful to take paracetamol. Paracetamol has been used routinely during all stages of pregnancy for pain relief. Overall it does not seem to have any harmful effects on baby. If the test has been done through the cervix you will probably have a little vaginal bleeding. We advise you to take things easy for the first day or two, take a couple of days off work and avoid doing housework. If you have a lot of pain or bleeding you should contact your local hospital.

When will I get the results?

The three most common chromosome problems Down's Syndrome, Edward's Syndrome and Patau's Syndrome will be checked for in 2-3 working days. A maternal blood sample is also required to enable laboratory staff to ensure they are looking at baby's cells and not mother's. We will contact you when the first part of the results are available by whichever method you have chosen (by telephone or by letter). The laboratory will then continue to check all the other chromosomes and it takes approximately another 7-10 days to get the final result, when we will contact you again.

How accurate is the test?

The test is very accurate – over 99%. However, the test is not 100% accurate.

Will the test need to be repeated?

Occasionally we get an inconclusive result, or the cells from the sample fail to grow in the laboratory. This is rare, but if it does happen the test would have to be repeated.

What are the risks associated with the test?

There is a small risk of miscarriage associated with the test. The risk of miscarriage for any pregnant woman at this stage of pregnancy is about 2-3%. By doing a CVB test we increase this risk by a further 1%, giving an overall risk of miscarriage after the test of 3-4%. Unfortunately, if a woman miscarries there is no way of knowing whether this was due to the test or whether it would have happened anyway.

Some studies have suggested that if a CVB test is carried out before 10 weeks of pregnancy there is a small risk of abnormalities to the baby's hands and feet. To avoid this risk we do not perform the test before 11 weeks of pregnancy.

Why do you need to know my blood group?

Some women are Rhesus blood group negative. It is important that we give these women an injection after the test to prevent complications related to this blood group. If you are Rhesus positive then you don't need an injection.

Further information

If you have any further questions about the test please ask your doctor or midwife.