

Chorionic Villus Sampling

Information Guide

What is chorionic villus sampling (CVS)?

This test is also known as a chorionic villus biopsy (CVB). Both the baby and the placenta (afterbirth) develop from the same fertilised egg cell and so the genetic makeup of the placenta is the same as that of the baby. This means that we can use a small piece of tissue from the placenta (a chorionic villus sample) to check the genes or chromosomes of the baby. This test can be performed from around 11 weeks of pregnancy and it is important that those choosing this test let us know as soon as they are pregnant.

What are the risks associated with the CVS?

There is a small risk of miscarriage associated with CVS. Some studies have suggested that if a CVS 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 CVS before 10 weeks of pregnancy.

Having a CVS increases the risk of miscarriage by about 1% over the background risk for that stage of pregnancy (about 2–3% for all women). Unfortunately, if a woman miscarries there is no way of knowing whether this was due to the CVS or whether it would have happened anyway, even if she hadn't had the procedure.

Where is the CVS done?

The CVS is done at St Mary's Hospital in the scan (radiology) department by a doctor and a midwife. You can bring your partner or someone else to support you during the procedure. You will need to have a full bladder for the scan and you can go home shortly afterwards.

Will the procedure need to be repeated?

How accurate is the test?

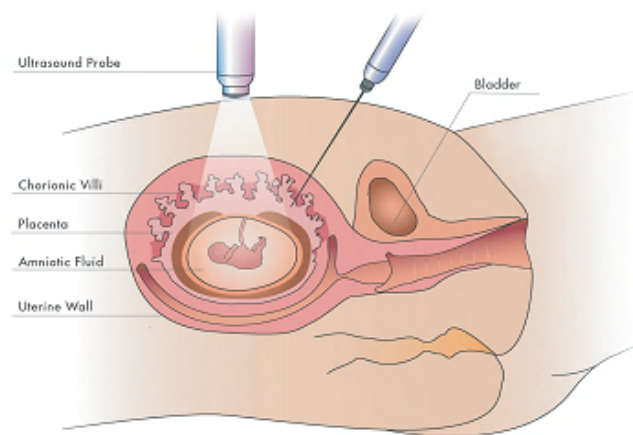
Usually the procedure is very reliable and we are able to give you an accurate result, but sometimes a further procedure may be necessary, for example if there is not enough sample to do the test, or if the cells fail to grow in the laboratory.

Occasionally the result may be difficult to interpret or give unexpected information. Your doctor would discuss these results with you at the time.

How is the CVS done? (Transabdominal method)

There are two ways in which samples can be obtained, and the doctor will decide which way is most appropriate for you.

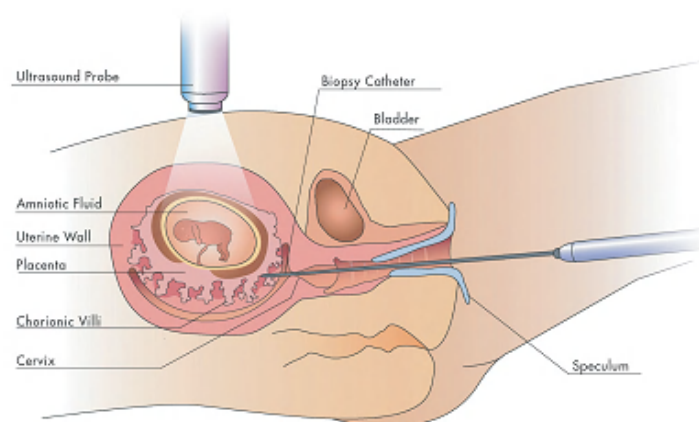
Usually, a fine needle is passed through the woman's abdomen into the placenta. The doctor watches the needle carefully using ultrasound scanning to ensure that it is correctly positioned in the placenta. The needle is then moved backwards and forwards to break off tiny pieces of placental tissue. The procedure lasts for just a few minutes. Sometimes it is not possible to get an adequate sample at the first attempt and the needle needs to be inserted again.



Transabdominal Chorionic Villus Sampling (reprinted from Greenwood Genetics Centre)

How is the CVS done? (Transcervical method)

In the second method, the CVS 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 because of the position of the placenta.



Transcervical Chorionic Villus Sampling (reprinted from Greenwood Genetics Centre)

Does it hurt?

You will feel some discomfort. However, the procedure usually only lasts a few minutes and most women cope quite well.

Why do you need to know my blood group?

Some women are blood group Rhesus 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.

HIV infection

It is important to let your midwife or doctor know in advance if you are HIV positive, so that measures can be taken to reduce the chance of transmitting the virus to the baby.

What should I do after a CVS?

For the first day or two you may have some crampy pain, like mild period pain. You may find it helpful to take paracetamol, which is safe in pregnancy. If the CVS 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 and if possible to take a couple of days off work. If you have a lot of pain or bleeding or develop a high temperature you should contact your GP or local hospital.

When will I get the results?

This depends on the condition being tested for, but the results are usually available in 1–3 weeks. When you come for the CVS, we will discuss with you when we expect to have the results and how you would like to be informed of these.

What will happen after I have received the results?

If after the result you decide not to continue with the pregnancy we will help you to liaise with your obstetrician and midwife to arrange a termination. There are two different procedures: at up to 12 weeks gestation it may be possible to have a termination of pregnancy under general anaesthetic. Beyond this stage, a termination would usually involve induction of labour.

For additional information or support

If you have any further questions about CVS please ask your genetic counsellor, doctor or midwife.

You could also contact:

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)

Providing support and information for women during the antenatal testing process.

Helpline 0207 631 0285
(Staffed Monday–Friday, 10.00am to 5.30pm.)

Email: info@arc-uk.org

Website: www.arc-uk.org

Do you have difficulty speaking or understanding English ?

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