

Amniocentesis

What is an amniocentesis?

When the fetus (developing baby) is in the womb it is surrounded by amniotic fluid. This fluid contains cells that have the same genetic make-up as the fetus. This means that we can use a small amount of this fluid to check the genes or chromosomes of the fetus. The test is very accurate and can be performed after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

What are the risks associated with an amniocentesis?

There is a small risk of miscarriage associated with an amniocentesis, which is up to 1% over the background risk for that stage of pregnancy (about 0.5%). Unfortunately, if a woman miscarries there is no way of knowing whether this was due to the amniocentesis or whether it would have happened anyway.

What do I do before the amniocentesis?

You will need to have a dating scan when you are at least 8 weeks pregnant, which will allow us to calculate when the procedure can be done. You will also need to have had your blood group tested to see if you are Rhesus positive or negative. If you are Rhesus negative you will need an injection after the procedure to prevent complications related to this. **You should come with a full bladder prior to the procedure.**

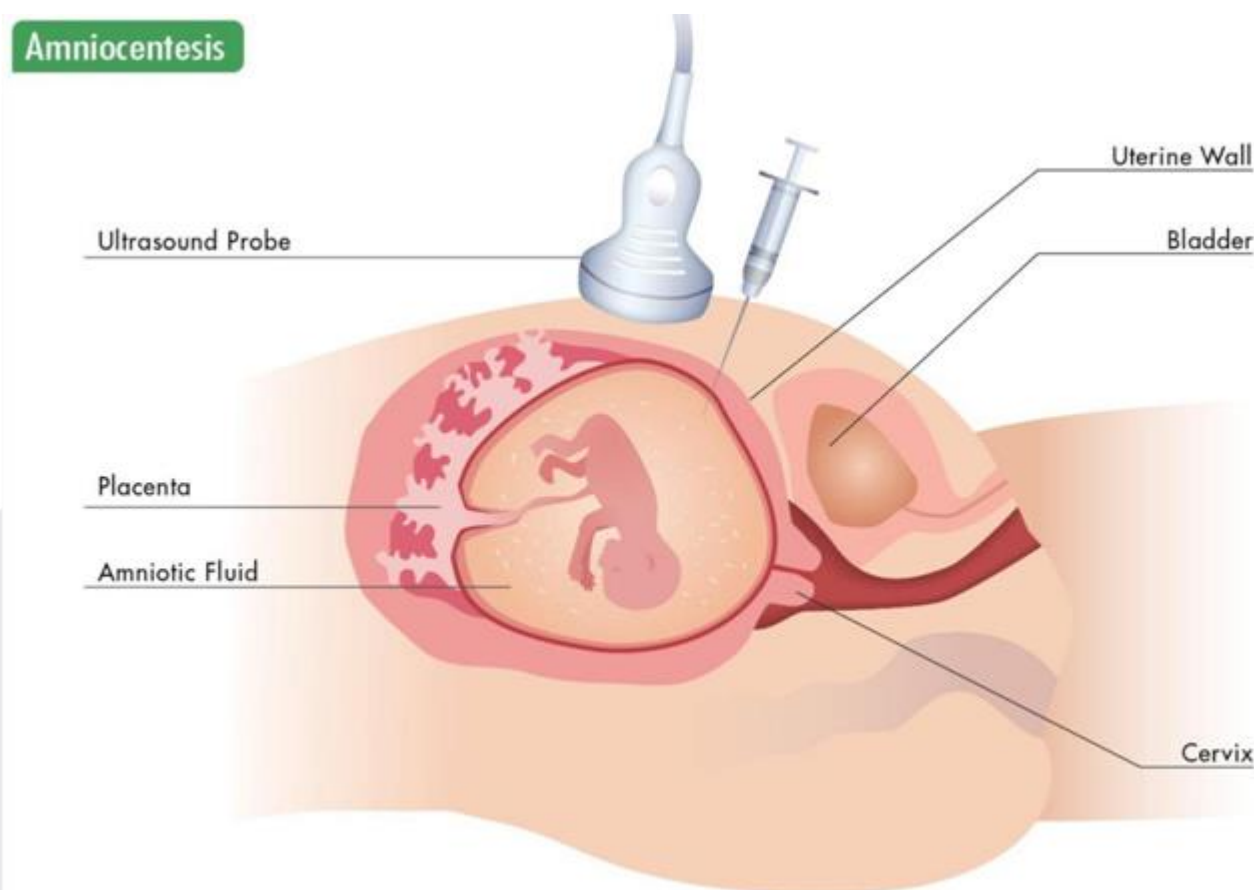
It is important that you let your midwife or doctor know in advance if you are HIV positive, so that measures can be taken to reduce the chance of transmitting the virus to the fetus.

What happens at the amniocentesis?

The amniocentesis will be done at Saint Mary's Hospital or at your local hospital in the scan (radiology) department by a doctor and a midwife. We recommend that you bring your partner or someone else to support you. You will not be able to drive yourself home after the procedure.

The doctor/midwife will discuss the procedure with you and take you through the consenting process. They will then scan your abdomen to check the positioning of the amniotic fluid. Occasionally, the doctor will ask you to fully or partially empty your bladder.

A needle will be passed through your abdomen into the fluid around the fetus. The needle is carefully monitored on ultrasound scan during the procedure. This ensures that it is correctly positioned in the fluid and does not touch the fetus. A small amount of fluid is taken and sent to the laboratory. Occasionally, the needle needs to be re-inserted if it cannot access the amniotic fluid or does not retrieve enough fluid.



(Reprinted from Greenwood Genetic Centre)

Does it hurt?

Anaesthetic will be applied to the skin (which you may feel as a brief, stabbing pain) but the abdominal muscle layers underneath cannot be anaesthetised. Most women describe an 'odd, uncomfortable' rather than 'painful' feeling as the needle passes through the muscle layers to reach the womb.

What happens after the amniocentesis?

Following the procedure, the midwife will talk to you about aftercare. For the first day or two you may have some cramping pain, like mild period pain. We advise you to take things easy for the first day or two and, if possible, take a couple of days off work. If you have a lot of pain or bleeding, lose any fluid, or develop a high temperature you should contact the hospital where you are booked for your antenatal care.

Sometimes the lab will be able to perform the test directly on the sample. However, if the sample is small it may need to be grown for a couple of weeks before testing can be performed. If there is not enough DNA or if the sample does not grow, the test cannot be performed. In this case, you could decide if you wanted the procedure repeated.

The results

Your Genetic Counsellor will discuss when we expect to have the results and how you would like to be informed. Occasionally the results can be a bit more complicated than expected, in which case an appointment could be arranged to discuss this.

Following the result, if you decide to continue with the pregnancy you will remain under the care of your Midwife and Obstetrician. You can contact your Genetic Counsellor at any stage if you have further questions or concerns. If you decide not to continue with the pregnancy, your Genetic Counsellor or Midwife will help make arrangements to end the pregnancy.

Additional information and support

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)

Provides support and information for women during the antenatal testing process

Helpline: **0845 077 2290** or **0207 713 7486**

Email: info@arc-uk.org

Website: <http://www.arc-uk.org/>

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

Manchester Centre for Genomic Medicine
Sixth Floor
Saint Mary's Hospital
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9WL

Telephone: (0161) 276 6506 (Reception)

Facsimile: (0161) 276 6145

The department is staffed Monday - Friday, 9.00 am to 5.00 pm.

Website: www.mangen.co.uk

Seen in clinic by (Doctor): _____

And (Genetic Counsellor): _____

Telephone number: _____

Family reference number: _____

Please let us know if you would like this leaflet in another format (e.g. large print, Braille, audio) or in another language.