

Gynaecology and Reproductive Medicine

# Pregnancy of unknown location

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet explains pregnancy of unknown location. If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, or anything else, please do not hesitate to ask your medical team.

### What is a pregnancy of unknown location (PUL)?

You have been given this leaflet because you have had an ultrasound but, unfortunately, we were unable to see the pregnancy on the screen today, meaning it was an inconclusive scan. This is known as a pregnancy of unknown location (PUL) and is a medical name, not a diagnosis.

There are three possible reasons a PUL may have occurred:

- A very small normal pregnancy in the uterus (womb) – the pregnancy may be normal, but too small to be seen on scan. Urinary pregnancy tests are now very sensitive and occasionally detect a pregnancy before they can be reliably seen using ultrasound.
- A miscarriage – the pregnancy may have already been lost and passed with bleeding and therefore cannot be seen on a scan. In these cases, the pregnancy test may remain positive for up to two weeks after the miscarriage.
- An ectopic pregnancy – the pregnancy may be developing outside the womb. This is the case in approximately 1 in every 10 PULs. The most common site for an ectopic pregnancy to grow is in the fallopian tubes and this may be difficult to see on a scan. An ectopic pregnancy can be a serious condition because it may cause internal bleeding, so we need to monitor women in this situation very carefully.

### Why do I need a blood test?

A blood test measures the amount of pregnancy hormones in your blood. This may tell us which of the three reasons (listed above) are the most likely for your PUL. Once we have the results, we will let you know when we need to see you again, either for a scan or a repeat blood test.

### What happens next?

You will usually need a second blood test 48 hours after the first one. The early pregnancy team will follow up your blood tests and call you with the results. We will continue to monitor you until

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we can confirm the outcome of your pregnancy, which can take up to 2 weeks. We will discuss each result with you in detail and try to keep you as informed as possible during this time.

If the pregnancy hormone levels in your blood are dropping very quickly, or start off at a very low level, then, unfortunately, it may be the result of a miscarriage (or, occasionally, a quickly resolving ectopic pregnancy that is unlikely to need treatment – we may never be able to be sure if this was the case). We will ask you to take a pregnancy test in 2 weeks to check that it is negative. If it is not, or if you are still bleeding at this point, you will be asked to call us and arrange to come in for a repeat scan or blood tests, or both

If the blood tests suggest an ectopic pregnancy may be a possibility, we will arrange to repeat blood tests or a scan, or both within 1 or 2 days.

Please see our leaflets on miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy for more details.

## What should I do if I get pain or bleeding?

If you develop any sudden abdominal pain, pain into the tips of your shoulders and/or diarrhoea you must return to the hospital immediately, as this may indicate an ectopic pregnancy that needs medical attention.

Heavier bleeding may, unfortunately, indicate that a miscarriage is more likely.

You should come to hospital if, at any stage, the bleeding becomes unmanageably heavy (for example, if you need to change a big pad more than once an hour). You are also welcome to call us for advice.

## Who can I contact for more information?

The gynaecology emergency care (GEC) at St Mary's Hospital: **020 3312 2185** (09.00 to 20.30, Monday to Sunday).

The early pregnancy assessment unit (EPAU) at Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea Hospital:

**020 3313 5131** (09.00 to 16.30, Monday to Friday).

Out of hours, you should go to the A&E department at St Mary's Hospital for assessment.

If you need urgent medical advice out of hours, you should phone the hospital switchboard on **020 3312 6666** and ask to be put through to the on-call gynaecology registrar or senior house officer (SHO). Please note that due to other emergencies in the hospital, they may not always be able to take your call immediately.

You can access all of our gynaecology leaflets on our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk) > [our services](#) > [gynaecology](#) > [patient information](#)

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## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net) Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: [imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

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