

Women's Services Patient Information

Pregnancy of Unknown Location

You have been diagnosed with a condition called 'pregnancy of unknown location' (PUL). This leaflet will tell you what this condition is and what to expect over the next few days to weeks.

What is a pregnancy of unknown location?

This is when a woman has had a positive pregnancy test but her ultrasound scan has not shown evidence of a developing pregnancy so far.

Why hasn't the pregnancy been seen?

There are a number of reasons for this;

1. There is a healthy pregnancy developing inside the womb and it is too early for the scan to show the pregnancy
2. There is a pregnancy developing slowly within the womb that will ultimately become a miscarriage
3. That sadly a miscarriage may have already occurred especially if you have experienced some heavy bleeding
4. The pregnancy is not developing inside the womb but instead within or on structures outside the womb. This is called an ectopic pregnancy.

What happens next?

A blood test will be taken to measure the pregnancy hormone level which is called human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG).

Once the result has been received and seen by a doctor, we will contact you with the management plan.

Most women will be able to go home once the blood test has been taken but you may be asked to stay in if you are also experiencing abdominal pain.

We may ask you to attend the women and newborn unit for a repeat hCG test 48 hours later. This is done because we want to see the pattern in the hCG levels.

- If the hCG levels are falling then this will represent a pregnancy that is not developing and we will either ask you to perform a urine pregnancy test in 2 weeks' time or return for another blood test
- If there is little change in the hCG level then this may represent a failing pregnancy or an ectopic pregnancy. We may then need to repeat the scan or repeat the blood test, this decision will be made by one of the senior doctors.
- If the hCG level increases by 63% or more then a repeat scan will be arranged. The timing of the scan will depend on the level of hCG within your blood.

Some patients will need to have repeated blood tests and scans until we can be sure what is happening.

Are there any symptoms that I need to be aware of?

If you develop worsening abdominal pain, shoulder tip pain, heavy bleeding or feel dizzy or faint then we would want you to contact Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit (EPAU) on the number below or attend the Emergency Department (ED). These symptoms may be sign of internal bleeding due to an ectopic pregnancy and it is essential that you seek a medical opinion quickly.

What treatments are available?

Expectant Management (wait and see)

If your hormone levels are dropping then we will continue to monitor your hCG levels until they are in the normal range. This can be done by performing blood tests and when we are happy that there has been a significant drop in the levels we will ask you to perform a urine pregnancy test 2-3 weeks later.

Medical management with a Methotrexate Injection

This is a treatment that can be used to manage either a PUL or an ectopic pregnancy. It stops the pregnancy from growing further. The pregnancy tissue then gradually disappears. Your suitability for this treatment will depend on your symptoms, scan findings and hCG level.

Laparoscopy (Surgical management)

This is an operation which will allow us to look inside the abdomen and look for signs of an ectopic pregnancy. This is performed when we strongly suspect the presence of an ectopic pregnancy and methotrexate injections are not appropriate. In some patients we will not find an ectopic pregnancy and then further blood tests or scans will be required after the operation.

Phone numbers

EPAU - 01274 364325 (24 hour helpline)

Smoking

Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke or use e-cigarettes in any of the hospital buildings or grounds.

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff to arrange this for you.

People with hearing and speech difficulties

You can contact us using the Relay UK app. Textphone users will need to dial 18001 ahead of the number to be contacted.