

HOSPITAL OFFERS NEW SCREENING FOR DOWN'S SYNDROME

A REVOLUTIONARY new Down's syndrome screening for pregnant women has been introduced at Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. The combined test involves two parts - a blood test and Nuchal Translucency Scan (NT scan), and will assess whether new babies are at risk of being born with Down's syndrome.

The combined test is a more accurate form of screening than the traditional NT scan – research shows the new screening has a 90% detection rate compared to the 60% detection rate for the old test.

All pregnant women who book to deliver at Dorset County Hospital are offered a scan between 11-14 weeks of pregnancy. Scans are conducted at this stage to check the baby is developing correctly and accurately calculate the date birth-date. Scans also assess the baby's heartbeat and check no abnormalities are developing. Screening for Down's syndrome is achieved by measuring a very thin film of fluid under the skin at the back of the baby's neck called the Nuchal Translucency.

All pregnant women are given written and verbal information about the screening offered for Down's syndrome and can choose to have no scan, a dating only scan or the combined screening. Women who choose to have the combined test are given an appointment in the Maternity Unit where a blood sample is obtained and sent to a specialist laboratory. Following this they will have the NT scan. Women receive their results within 5 days for a 'low-risk' result and 3 days for a 'high-risk' result. Women with a high-risk result are contacted by the Antenatal

Screening Co-ordinator and offered an appointment to be counselled about all their options.

Jane Hall, Clinical Leader Antenatal and Screening said 'Traditional scans are only 60% effective; this new screening test is much more accurate and will substantially reduce the number of women whose babies are given a 'high-risk result' for Down's Syndrome. It is a tremendous decision to invest in this new screening process, which will greatly help expectant mothers in the region.'

More information about Down's syndrome screening is available online at: www.screening.nhs.uk or contact your midwife.

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