

## A Guide to Pregnancy of Unknown Location

***The ultrasound examination has shown a pregnancy of unknown location. This information leaflet will help you to understand what this means and what will happen next.***

### **What is a pregnancy of unknown location?**

This is a temporary term that is used when a woman in early pregnancy has a positive pregnancy test, but an ultrasound does not clearly identify a pregnancy.

### **How do I find out what is happening with the pregnancy?**

To ensure your safety and care, a thorough and cautious approach is taken to identify or exclude an ectopic pregnancy.

There are ultrasound or things that help us to give you the answer:

- You will be asked questions about your symptoms. You may need an abdominal and internal examination.
- Blood will be taken to assess your hormone levels – looking at a hormone level called  $\beta$ HCG. This is a guide for what is happening in early pregnancy.
- The hormone level test is repeated in 48hrs. This tells us if the hormone level is rising or falling and helps guide what to do next.

### **What do the blood tests mean?**

Once the pregnancy hormone is positive in the blood test, we need to carry out another blood test 48hrs later. If there is a sharp rise in hormone levels, this may confirm an early pregnancy. If there is a sharp decrease in levels, this would, unfortunately, confirm a miscarriage.

Occasionally, ultrasound or blood tests over an extended time, may need to be taken. Normally, this takes a week or two, so the pattern or trend of the hormone can be fully understood. Unfortunately, this is usually not a good sign for the pregnancy being successful. This means the pregnancy is either failing due to miscarriage or failing because it is growing outside the womb.

### **What are the possible outcomes of a pregnancy of unknown location?**

There are three possibilities:

1. *You may be very early in pregnancy.* An ultrasound scan before 6 weeks is of limited use. The hormone level blood tests are more helpful at this early stage.
2. *You may have a failing pregnancy that is too small to see on ultrasound or already have miscarried.* Some women might have pain/bleeding before attending the clinic. A pregnancy test can remain positive for many weeks following a miscarriage, until pregnancy hormones return to pre-pregnancy levels.
3. *You may have an ectopic pregnancy.* This is where the pregnancy grows in an abnormal location usually outside of the womb. Sadly, an ectopic will always be a pregnancy that will not survive.

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### How long before I get any answers?

- If an early pregnancy is diagnosed by blood test, a further scan will be needed. It is common to allow the pregnancy time to grow, and scan again within 2-3 weeks.
- Sadly, in some women a miscarriage will be confirmed. A further scan may be advised to ensure the lining of the womb returns to normal, but this varies depending on previous scan findings and blood results.
- Ectopic pregnancy can occur in about 1 in 80 women. If we are concerned about an ectopic pregnancy, additional blood tests and scans will be needed. There is a separate leaflet available for ectopic pregnancy.

### While I am waiting for results, what do I need to look out for?

If you feel unwell at home in any way, it is important that you call us directly at the CUMH Emergency Room. These are the symptoms you should phone us about:

**Bleeding:** Heavier than a normal period or passing large clots.

**Feeling faint and dizzy:** Especially when standing up.

**Pain in your stomach:** Any pain that increases / does not go away taking mild painkillers.

**Specific sharp pain to the right or left side.**

**Pain in your shoulders.**

**Diarrhoea / loose stools** (in combination with any of the above).

### When can I return to work?

This is dependent on you and how you feel. Some women choose not to return to work until after their follow-up scan. Normal physical activities can be resumed once you feel that you are ready, but it is not unusual to feel tired and emotional during the next few weeks. We can provide a letter for your employer as necessary.

### If you have any questions or worries, please contact Cork University Maternity Hospital

If you were due to be seen at the community early pregnancy unit and there are changes in your symptoms or concerns. It is important to please phone us directly or the CUMH emergency room which is open 24 hours for advice +/-assessment as it may be more appropriate to look after you in the CUMH.

### If you have any questions or worries, please contact Cork University Maternity Hospital:

|                                       |               |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Reception</b>                      | (021) 4920500 |
| <b>Emergency Room</b>                 | (021) 4920545 |
| <b>Early Pregnancy Unit</b>           | (021) 4927441 |
| <b>Bereavement &amp; Loss Service</b> | (021) 4920500 |
| <b>2 South Ward</b>                   | (021) 4920628 |