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Leaflet number: 4315/VER4
Date published: January 2019
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A list of sources is available on request
Why have I been referred?
The preterm surveillance clinic aims to provide extra care for women who may have a higher risk of having a baby born too early. This can be for a number of reasons, such as:

- previous birth before 37 weeks
- previous late miscarriage
- the 'waters' (amniotic sac) have broken before 37 weeks in a previous pregnancy
- previous surgery to the cervix after an abnormal smear test
- an unusually shaped womb (uterus)
- women expecting more than one baby.

Often we will see you in the clinic two or three times to be able to reassure you that your pregnancy is progressing well and then discharge you from the clinic around 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Sometimes we may think it is useful to monitor you more regularly and we may be able to offer you treatments that reduce the risk of preterm birth.

Appointments in the clinic
The preterm surveillance clinic is held on Wednesdays in the Fetal Medicine Unit, 8th floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

What will happen when I visit the clinic?
- You will usually speak with a midwife who will ask about your history and discuss your personalised plan of care.
- You may be offered a transvaginal ultrasound scan of your cervix, where an ultrasound probe is placed into the vagina. Your bladder should be empty for this scan.
- If you are over 18 weeks pregnant, you may also be offered a vaginal swab test (fetal fibronectin) to help predict your risk of an early birth. This is done with a speculum and then a swab (like a cotton bud) is placed in the vagina for a few seconds. Your swab result is usually ready after 10-25 minutes.
- Sometimes emergencies and unexpected events can increase waiting times. We appreciate your patience and will keep you informed if delays occur.

These signs may include:
- period-like pains or cramps which come and go
- fluid leaking from the vagina
- bleeding from the vagina.

When to seek advice

Sometimes there are signs that you may be going into labour. Often the signs may not lead to preterm labour but it is important to let your midwife know so you can get advice.

If you think you may be in labour, do not wait for your next appointment in the preterm surveillance clinic. Call the Maternity Assessment Unit (MAU) immediately, t: 020 7188 1723 or 020 7188 1722.

Should I still attend my antenatal appointments?
Yes. You should attend all other antenatal appointments in addition to visiting us.

There are some things which make the swab test less reliable. We recommend that you avoid the following for two days before you attend the clinic:
- sexual intercourse
- vaginal douching (this involves flushing the vagina with water for the purpose of cleaning).
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