

Preterm Birth Prevention and Surveillance Clinic – Patient Information

Introduction

We normally expect babies to be born between 37 – 42 weeks of pregnancy. When babies are born before 37 weeks of pregnancy it is known as a preterm (premature) birth. Approximately 8 out of 100 babies are born prematurely before 37 weeks.

Babies born prematurely have an increased risk of health problems and may need to spend time in a neonatal unit (a special ward for sick or premature babies). Generally, the earlier they are born, the longer they usually need to spend in the neonatal unit. Sometimes preterm birth occurs unpredictably and we do not know why it happens. However, there are some factors that we do know can increase the risk of having a preterm birth. This clinic aims to offer extra care to women with known risk factors to make unexpected preterm birth less likely.

The Preterm Birth Prevention and Surveillance Clinic

You have been referred to the Preterm Birth Prevention and Surveillance Clinic because you have been identified as having at least one of the risk factors below:

- You had a previous preterm birth between 24 and 34 weeks of pregnancy after going into labour naturally.
- Your waters broke on their own before 34 weeks in a previous pregnancy.
- You have previously experienced a loss (late miscarriage) of your pregnancy and baby between 16 and 24 weeks of pregnancy.
- You have been told that you have a variation in the size and shape of your uterus (bicornuate, septate, unicornuate or didelphys uterus).
- You have had surgical treatment to your cervix known as a 'LLETZ' or 'cone biopsy' where more than 15mm depth of your cervix has been removed (or if we do not have a record of the depth removed). This is not the same as colposcopy and punch biopsy.
- You have adhesions (scar tissue) inside your uterus – known as Asherman's Syndrome
- You have previously had radial trachelectomy for cancer of the cervix
- You have previously given birth by caesarean section when your cervix was fully (10cm) dilated.
- You have had a cervical stitch (cerclage) in a previous pregnancy.

If you have one or more of these risk factors – it does **not** mean you will have a preterm birth – just that there is a slightly increased risk. If you do not think you have any of these risk factors but have been given an appointment for the Preterm Birth Prevention and Surveillance Clinic, please let us know as soon as possible by calling 0300 614 5000 for Frimley Park Hospital and 0300 615 4513 for Wexham Park Hospital.

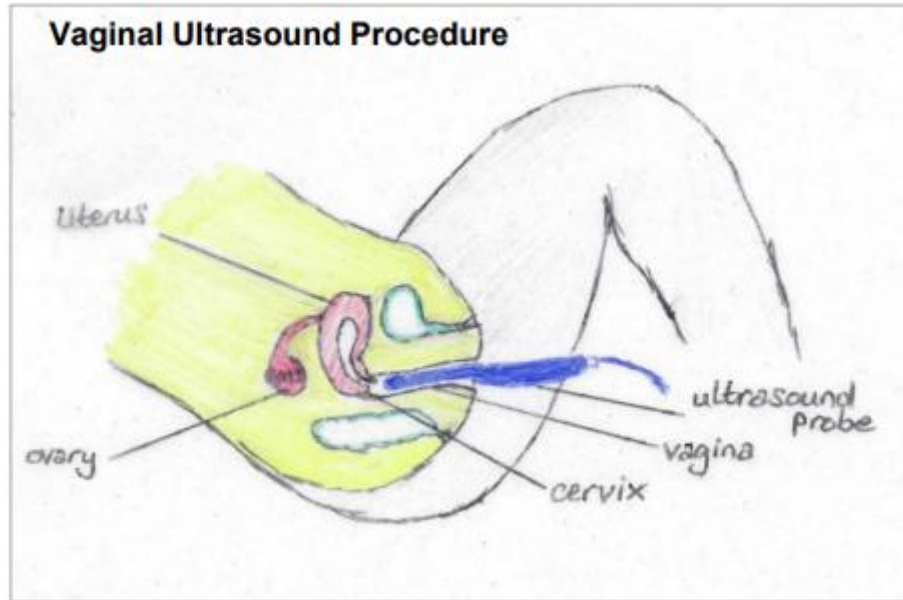
The Preterm Birth Prevention and Surveillance Clinic is a clinic led by a Consultant Obstetrician (doctor of pregnancy) and Specialist Midwife. The team will give personalised care and extra support to women who are at higher risk of preterm birth. The exact care will depend on individual circumstances. Some women will be seen for a first appointment from 14 weeks of pregnancy and some do not need to be seen until 18 weeks of pregnancy. Some women only need 1 appointment and some women will have several appointments. This will be discussed with you by the Consultant and Midwife.



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What should I expect at my appointment?

You will meet a member of the preterm birth team who will discuss your personal risk factors and ask about your medical and birth history. You will be offered a transvaginal scan. This is an internal scan where a probe will be gently inserted inside your vagina to measure the length of your cervix. The length of your cervix can give a good indication of how likely you are to go into labour early.



You will be asked to go to the toilet before this scan because it needs to be done when your bladder is empty. Some women are worried about this type of scan but it is not usually painful and is very safe in pregnancy. It will not harm you or your baby. You will be offered a chaperone during the scan and your partner can be present if you wish. Please let the team know if you are particularly anxious about having this scan so we can provide extra reassurance.

This scan will be carried out either by the Consultant Obstetrician or a member of the ultrasonography team. There are both female and male clinicians who are specially trained to perform this type of scan.

You may also be asked to provide a urine sample and have a vaginal swab to test for infections.

What happens next?

Most women will not need any treatment or further management. If the transvaginal scan shows that you have a normal length cervix and a low chance of preterm birth then you will not need to be seen in the clinic any more. You may still be under Consultant Led Care in your pregnancy for other reasons or be discharged to Midwifery Led Care.

Some women will need to have several scans during her pregnancy to monitor the length of her cervix. In some cases, the Consultant will recommend treatment which may include a pessary containing the hormone progesterone or have a cervical suture (stitch) put in the cervix to prevent it opening too soon in the pregnancy. You may have already had these treatments in very early pregnancy and so are coming to the clinic for surveillance alone.



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Frimley Health incorporates Frimley Park Hospital, Heatherwood Hospital and Wexham Park Hospital
Headquarters: Portsmouth Road, Frimley, Camberley, Surrey, GU16 7UJ 01276 604604

How will I know if I am in preterm labour?

It can be difficult to predict who will go into preterm labour and sometimes it can happen without any warning. It is very important that if you experience any of the following symptoms you call the MAMAS line straight away and tell them you are at risk of preterm labour and under the care of the Preterm Birth Prevention and Surveillance Clinic:

- Regular painful contractions or tightening of your uterus
- Cramps like strong period pains
- Feeling of pressure in your vaginal area
- A 'show' – when the mucous plug in the cervix comes away
- A leak or gush of fluid from your vagina
- Unusual backache
- Bleeding from the vagina

Maternity and Midwifery Advice and Support (MAMAS) Line

24-hour maternity telephone triage service supporting women across
our Trust

0300 013 2004

If you have any questions about your care or your appointment, or if you are unable to attend and wish to reschedule your appointment, please let us know by calling the Antenatal Clinics:

For Wexham Park Hospital: 0300 615 4513

For Frimley Park Hospital: 0300 613 2581

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