

Prevention Pre-Term Birth Clinic

Information for Patients

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with the facts and information about the Prevention Pre-term Birth Clinic (PPTB) so that you and/or your partner will know what to expect from your visit to the clinic.

Appointments

Please bring your antenatal pregnancy book to this appointment and check in at the main Antenatal Clinic Reception desk (Antenatal Clinic & Ultrasound Department within Lancashire Women & Newborn Centre, Burnley General Teaching Hospital - Level 1). You will then be directed to the Antenatal Wellbeing Unit and you will need to hand your pregnancy book to the receptionist within that area.

What is the Pre-term Birth Clinic?

You have been referred to the PPTB Clinic because you have either had, or are at risk of, a premature birth (less than 34 weeks), or very early rupture of membranes (PROM). The PPTB clinic is a consultant led specialist clinic which is run once a week.

What happens at the first visit to the clinic?

When you attend the PPTB clinic for the first visit, the Consultant will discuss your previous history with you, undertake a clinical assessment, and discuss the best method of management for your pregnancy.

This may include having transvaginal scans and commencing hormones (progesterone pessaries) from 16-34 weeks of pregnancy. Following clinical assessment some pregnancies may need minor surgery (cervical stitch) or an arabin cervical pessary (additional leaflets are available). These will be discussed if required.

Vaginal swabs are usually taken at the time of referral to this clinic alongside a urine sample to rule out any infections. If left untreated this could be a risk factor for pre-term birth or late miscarriage so detection is vital.

What is a transvaginal scan?

A transvaginal scan is an ultrasound scan performed through the vagina to see the cervix clearly. It is necessary to perform the test through the vagina because it allows closer inspection and a clearer image of the cervix than an ultrasound scan

performed through the abdomen. The ultrasound scan will assess the length of the cervix and whether the neck of the womb is closed, helping us to base our clinical management of your pregnancy better. This may be slightly uncomfortable but shouldn't hurt.

How safe is a transvaginal scan?

Transvaginal scans are commonly performed for bleeding and miscarriage complications in pregnancy. They are considered to be safe in early pregnancy. The insertion of the ultrasound probe does not affect the pregnancy as the probe remains in the vagina and does not reach the uterus or fetus although the lower half of the uterus can be seen on the scan. It will not cause any trauma or bleeding or miscarriage.

Do I need a full bladder prior to the scan?

You do not need to have a full bladder. In fact, it is preferable if your bladder is empty at the time of examination.

What happens at subsequent visits?

You may return to the clinic for transvaginal scans to check that the cervix is maintaining its length. Depending on your clinical history, this will determine how many scans you have within PPTB clinic up until 24 weeks of pregnancy. You will also have your blood pressure and urine checked at every appointment (please remember to bring a sample).

A vaginal fetal fibronectin (fFN) swab can also be taken if considered high risk of early labour. Fetal fibronectin is a special protein made by fetal cells in the womb, and acts as a 'glue' that keeps the amniotic sac attached to the lining of the womb. The lower the concentration of fFN the less likely a woman is to go into labour early. This swab would be taken prior to the transvaginal scan and takes 10 mins to process the results.

Using the QUIPP app (this can be downloaded onto your phone or online www.quipp.org) you can enter the fFN result as well as individual history. This will give you a percentage of probability of spontaneous delivery within 1 week, 2 weeks, 4 weeks or before 30, 34 & 37 weeks. This can be a guide in deciding when would be the best time to offer steroid injections to help your baby's lungs develop.

If you have any concerns please contact:

Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit (EPAU) -01282 804268 (< 20 weeks)
Antenatal Triage - 01282 804213 (after 20 weeks)
Lead Midwife for PPTB Clinic - 01282 804274

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