



**Oncology and Haematology Department**  
**Pregnancy testing before cancer treatment**  
**Information for girls and young women**

## **Introduction**

This fact sheet aims to provide information about the reasons why pregnancy testing is important for girls and young women who are about to receive chemotherapy treatment.

## **Why it is important you tell us you might be pregnant?**

If you are pregnant when you have treatments for cancer (which may include chemotherapy, radiotherapy, surgery, scans/x-rays), it may harm your unborn baby. This is especially true at the beginning of a pregnancy, when you might not realise you are pregnant. There is also a chance of you having a miscarriage (losing the baby).

The treatment you have been prescribed is very important for the management of your cancer. If you are pregnant, we need to know before any further treatment can be given. Difficult decisions may need to be made about how your cancer and pregnancy are managed. We will offer support to help you make the decision that is right for you.

## **Why we are asking girls and young women if they might be pregnant**

We understand that many girls /young women are not having sex, so it is not possible for them to be pregnant. We do not know who is and who isn't sexually active and many girls may not want to tell us if they are.

By doing a pregnancy test, we hope to prevent harm to any unborn baby.

## **Pregnancy testing at Alder Hey**

Women and girls considered to be of a "child bearing age" is generally agreed to be between 12-55 years <sup>(1)</sup>. National guidance <sup>(2)</sup> recommends that pregnancy is excluded. This means we have to know whether a female patient aged 12 years or older undergoing treatment for cancer is pregnant.

Some drug manufacturers now state that a pregnancy test must be performed before giving treatment to any female patient of childbearing age.

All female patients aged 12 years or older attending Alder Hey for chemotherapy will be asked to have a pregnancy test before starting their treatment. Each month they will be asked to have a pregnancy test again until chemotherapy has been completed.

## **Permission to test**

Girls and young women judged to be competent by their health professional to make decisions for themselves will have their confidentiality protected.

We will ask for consent for pregnancy testing when you are diagnosed and before treatment begins. Although pregnancy testing will be repeated each month until you have completed treatment we will not ask you to sign consent again.

## **Parents and carers**

Decisions to share information with parents and carers will be taken using the judgement of a health professional. Their decisions will be based on a patient's age, maturity and assessment of competence.

## **What does a pregnancy test involve?**

We will ask for a sample of your urine which will be sent to the hospital laboratory.

If the test result is positive (meaning you are pregnant) we will have a private discussion with you. We will always encourage you to involve your parent or carer, but we would not tell them the result without your permission.

A decision will need to be made about what to do next, and we would advise you to involve your parent or carer about your future treatment.

## **What to do if you think you might be pregnant when I come to hospital?**

It is important that you tell a nurse or doctor, Please remember everything you tell us will be treated confidentially. We will not tell anyone else without your permission unless it is to protect you from a harmful situation.

If you have had unprotected sex very recently, it is possible that a pregnancy test could be negative, but you may still be pregnant. If this is the case a doctor will talk to you about your options.

## **Who you can talk to for further information**

If you are unclear about anything or have questions you can speak privately to a doctor or nurse.

This fact sheet only gives general information. You must always discuss your individual treatment with the appropriate member of staff. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about your treatment. This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested.

1 NPSA April 2010 Rapid Response Report NPSA/2010/RRR011 Checking pregnancy before surgery

2 TYAC Best Practice Statement Pregnancy Assessment/testing in teenage and young adult females August 2015

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ONCPRGYW/F/1 ©Alder Hey 2017 Next review date: January 2019

PIAG090