

Safer Down's test for pregnant women to be introduced in Wales

Public Health Minister Rebecca Evans has confirmed the Welsh Government has agreed to the introduction of non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) within the antenatal screening programme in Wales.

NIPT, a blood sample analysed in a laboratory, will be added to the screening pathway as an additional option for women who accept current primary screening and are assessed as being at higher chance of Down's, Edwards' and Patau's syndrome.

The current antenatal screening programme offers pregnant women a number of different primary screening tests to detect some of the conditions that may affect either the woman or their baby. One of these screening tests shows the chance of having a baby with Down's syndrome. If this is equal to or higher than 1 in 150, women are considered higher chance but are currently only offered the option of an invasive test to confirm the diagnosis. These invasive diagnostic tests carry a small risk of miscarriage.

NIPT will be offered as an additional option to these invasive tests and for women who receive a negative result, no further tests will be required. It is expected that 1 to 2 babies per year in Wales will be saved from miscarriage as a result of the introduction of NIPT.

NIPT will be rolled out as soon as practicable during 2018. Work is already underway with the other UK nations and charities on the development of health professional training and patient information, designed to ensure women are supported to make a fully informed decision.

Public Health Minister, Rebecca Evans said:

"We want to ensure every expectant mother in Wales receives the information, advice and support they need throughout their pregnancy. Our antenatal screening programme plays an important role in this.

"The Welsh Government has accepted the recommendations made by the UK National Screening Committee and the Wales Screening Committee to introduce Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) as an additional option for women identified as higher chance for Down's, and to add screening for Edwards' and Patau's syndrome and screening in twin pregnancies within the screening pathway in Wales.

"NIPT is more accurate than the current primary tests. A negative NIPT result will offer pregnant women the reassurance they need, without the need for a further invasive diagnostic test – reducing the unnecessary harm from miscarriage that can be caused through the use of these tests."

The introduction of NIPT will be evaluated over the next 3 years, in line with recommendations made by the UK National Screening Committee and the Wales Screening Committee.