

Pregnancy of Unknown Location (PUL)

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What is a Pregnancy of Unknown Location (PUL)?

PUL is used to describe cases where there is a positive pregnancy test but no sign of a pregnancy inside or outside the uterus (womb), either on an ultra sound scan or on a laparoscopy (keyhole camera surgery).

What causes a PUL?

There are three possibilities:

- You may be very early into the pregnancy. Your pregnancy may be developing normally, and in the correct place, but it is too small to be seen on an ultrasound scan.

It is normal not to have clarity on a scan before 6 weeks.

- You may have had a miscarriage. You may have had some bleeding and lost the pregnancy prior to attending the clinic. A pregnancy test can stay positive for up to two weeks following a miscarriage until the hormones completely settle down. A 'complete' miscarriage cannot be presumed until other possibilities, eg. ectopic pregnancy, have been excluded.
- You may have an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy that is developing outside of the womb, typically in the fallopian tube. Ectopic pregnancies are often too small to be seen on a scan. Unfortunately, a pregnancy cannot survive in this situation. This is because as the foetus gets bigger it can run out of space to grow and rupture the fallopian tube, causing severe pain and internal bleeding.

What investigations are needed?

There are a number of things that may help the doctor to give you an answer:

- Consultation and examination – You will be asked about your medical history and current symptoms. The doctor may examine your abdomen and may also do a vaginal (internal) examination.

- Blood tests – Blood will be taken to establish the level of human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG) and progesterone (both pregnancy hormones) in the bloodstream. We will contact you with the results.
- You may need a repeat scan.

How long before a diagnosis is made?

We understand that this is an anxious time for you and that waiting and uncertainty are always difficult and stressful. We usually have the results of your first blood test on the same day but it is likely that you will need to have a second blood test 48 hours later to see how the levels are behaving. In some situations, additional blood tests are needed.

Follow-up

- Early Intrauterine Pregnancy.

If your blood test results indicate an early pregnancy which is developing in the womb but is too small to be seen on the scan you will be offered a repeat scan in 1-2 weeks. Assuming the pregnancy is developing normally, enough development should have occurred in this time for the pregnancy to show on a scan.

- Miscarriage/ Failing Pregnancy

If your blood test results indicate a complete miscarriage or a failing pregnancy we will offer you a support telephone call in 1-2 weeks to check your symptoms have resolved. We may also ask you do a urine specimen to check that your pregnancy hormones have returned to normal.

- Ectopic

If your blood test results indicate an ectopic pregnancy the treatment options will be discussed with you.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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