

# Pregnancy Test Before Anesthesia and Surgery

*At University of Washington Medical Center*

*This handout explains why we advise a pregnancy test before anesthesia and surgery. This handout is in addition to the talks you have with your care providers. Please read this handout and ask your nurse or providers any questions you have.*

## Why should I have a pregnancy test before my surgery?

*Anesthesia* (sleeping medicine) given during surgery may cause serious health problems for an unborn child. We advise you to have a pregnancy test on the day of your surgery if:

- There is any chance you could be pregnant
- Being pregnant might affect your decision about having surgery

We can do this test after you check in.

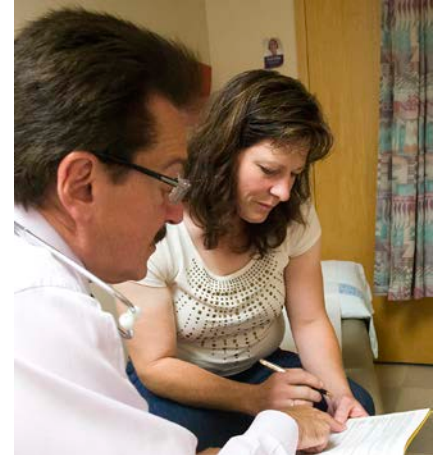
## How is the test done?

We usually use a urine sample for this test. If you cannot provide a urine sample, we will draw a small sample of your blood to test.

## What do studies show about anesthesia during pregnancy?

Studies vary in their results. Studies done before 1980 showed that having anesthesia and surgery during early pregnancy may result in:

- Miscarriage
- Birth defects in the fetus



*Talk with your provider if you have any questions or concerns about having a pregnancy test before your surgery.*

But, studies done after 1990 show other results. If the patient is healthy and it is not an emergency surgery, there may not be any harm to the fetus.

Studies done on animals show that it may be best not to have surgery in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy. The anesthesia may affect behavior and learning in the baby animals after they are born.

But, we do not know exactly how anesthesia may affect a growing human fetus. We also do not know how it may affect the pregnancy or the infant after birth. Based on studies, we believe that if a pregnant woman has anesthesia only once and only for a short time, it should not cause brain problems in an unborn child.

## What happens if the test shows I am pregnant?

Many anesthesiologists advise pregnant women to wait to have anesthesia and surgery, if waiting will not harm your health. Also, many surgeons will not do *elective surgery* (surgery that is not needed to protect your health) on pregnant women.

But, pregnant women should not delay or avoid surgeries or procedures during pregnancy, if waiting could cause harm to them or their infants.

If your test shows you are pregnant (a *positive* result), your surgeon and anesthesiologist will talk with you. They will explain the risks and benefits of having your surgery at this time. You can choose to go ahead with your surgery or to wait.

## Who will see the results of my pregnancy test?

**Results of your test are private.** We will **not** share them with anyone other than you and your care providers, unless you tell us otherwise.

## Do I have to have this test?

On the day of your surgery, we will ask your permission to do this pregnancy test. You may decide not to have this test.

If you do not have the test, you will not know about a possible early pregnancy. This means you cannot use this information to decide about going ahead with your surgery.

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Pre-Anesthesia Clinic:  
206.598.6334

Maternal Infant Care Clinic:  
206.598.4070