



Preterm Birth Clinic

This leaflet explains what happens at our specialist clinic, which monitors and treats those at a higher risk of spontaneous late miscarriage early preterm (premature) birth.

What is the Preterm Birth Clinic?

It is a specialist clinic which monitors and treats those who are at a higher risk of spontaneous early preterm (premature) birth. This means birth before 34 weeks of pregnancy. We also see people with a history of second trimester miscarriage (after 16 weeks) that are related to an issue with the cervix. The clinic is led by a consultant in fetal medicine and obstetrics (Miss Surabhi Bisht) and patients referred to this clinic will get to see either Miss Surabhi Bisht or Miss Shivani Gajree our resident consultants. There will be a healthcare assistant who will be assisting them during assessments in the clinic.

Why have I been referred here?

The information you gave your midwife at booking suggests that you may have one or more of the following risk factors for your baby/babies being born early. This could be something that happened in a previous pregnancy or birth or related to a health condition or surgical procedure you have had in the past. We know that you may be at higher chance of preterm birth if:

- You have had a previous baby born before 34 weeks.
- You have had a previous late miscarriage (16–24 weeks).
- Your 'waters' (amniotic sac) broke before 34 weeks in a previous pregnancy.
- You have had certain types of treatment to your cervix (for example, LLETZ or cone biopsy for a treatment of an abnormal smear).
- A previous Caesarean birth at full dilatation.
- A short cervix found during a scan in this or a previous pregnancy.
- You have an unusually shaped uterus (womb) or scarring to the lining of your uterus.
- You had a cervical cerclage (stitch around the neck of your womb) in a previous pregnancy, or you have a stitch in place now.

If you have one or more of these risk factors, it does not necessarily mean you will have a premature birth or a second trimester miscarriage, but it does mean we will offer additional monitoring and any appropriate treatment.

What care does the Preterm Birth Clinic offer?

The care we offer aims to reduce your chance of premature birth or second trimester miscarriage. We look at what may have happened during a previous pregnancy, if relevant and the results of the tests you have in the clinic, to find out if you are at high risk of premature birth and whether you should be offered any treatment or interventions.

We will work with you to develop your individual care plan at your first visit (usually when you are around 14–16 weeks). We base your care plan on your pregnancy history and the length of your cervix which is measured during the scan you have at your first appointment with us. The plan sets out the monitoring that is recommended and includes what may happen if something changes while we are monitoring you. It is important to know that not all treatments are appropriate or effective for everyone so the care plan will be shaped around your own unique history and needs. We will also provide you with support and reassurance during what may be an anxious time for you. It is important to understand that while there is evidence to suggest the monitoring and treatment can reduce your chances, unfortunately, not all miscarriages and preterm births can be prevented.

What tests will I have at the Preterm Birth Clinic?

We will offer you one or more of these investigations, depending on your risk factors:

- A urine test and/or a vaginal swab (taken using a speculum) to check for infection. We know that some infections can make a second trimester miscarriage or premature birth more likely.
- A trans-vaginal scan, this procedure involves placing an ultrasound probe into your vagina to measure the length of your cervix. We know that a short cervix can increase your likelihood of a second trimester miscarriage or premature birth.
- A vaginal swab (AmniSure® test) which looks for any trace of amniotic fluid in your vagina which would indicate that your waters may have broken or been leaking. This gives either a negative or positive result. A negative result on the AmniSure® test means that it is highly unlikely that you will give birth in the next week or ten days, which can set your mind at ease and allow us to hold off any treatments that may not be needed. A positive result means there is a higher chance of giving birth early, but it does not mean you are definitely about to give birth or that you'll necessarily deliver early.

Do the tests have any risks?

All of these tests are safe for you and your baby. Please talk to us about any concerns you may have so that we can provide reassurance or explain the tests in more detail.

What treatment will I be offered if I am at high risk of premature birth or late miscarriage?

There are a number of treatments which we may offer you to reduce the likelihood of premature birth or late miscarriage, including one or more of the following:

- Cervical cerclage, where a stitch is put around the neck of your womb (this can be done up to 22–24 weeks).
- Progesterone (hormone) suppositories which you can put into your vagina yourself usually until around 34 weeks.
- Antibiotics to treat any infection found on a urine or swab test.

If you are at high risk of premature birth after 24 weeks of pregnancy, we may offer you steroid tablets or injections to help your baby/babies' lungs develop. Magnesium sulphate injection would be offered to you for 'brain protection' for your baby if delivering before 32 weeks of gestation. Your care may need transferring to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, who have a specialist unit to care for you and your baby/babies if delivery is anticipated before 28 weeks of gestation.

Do I still need to see my midwife or attend other planned antenatal appointments?

Yes, it is important to attend all antenatal appointments that have been planned for you including your midwife appointments, routine scan appointments and any other obstetric appointments that have been booked (for example care from a specialist team such as the Gestational Diabetes team). You will usually be monitored in the Preterm Birth Clinic until you are around 24 weeks. When you are discharged from the Clinic an individual plan will be made with you that will set out any follow-up care that you may need or if you could be discharged to midwifery led care.

Information on threatened preterm labour

Threatened preterm labour is the term used for when you experience symptoms, such as contractions, before your expected due date, which may lead to your baby being born prematurely (early). We can provide you with a leaflet which will explain what preterm labour is, how to recognise symptoms and what you can do during pregnancy to reduce the likelihood of preterm labour happening. Type in "Threatened preterm labour" into the search by term box on the Trust website here <https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/leaflets-catalogue/> or ask for a copy.

Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

All your queries will be answered by your consultant either Miss Bisht or Miss Gajree when you see them in the Preterm Birth Clinic. The Specialist Preterm Birth Clinic midwife will also be able to offer you non-urgent support and answer any questions which you may think of after you have left your clinic appointment. The email for the preterm birth clinic is rbb-tr.pretermbirth@nhs.net

In an emergency situation, for example you think you are in labour or are experiencing any bleeding or fluid loss and you need to be seen as soon as possible, please contact the Triage Line on **0118 322 7304** or the Maternity Assessment Unit (MAU) on **0118 322 8468**.

Further information on cervical stitch

You can find information from the Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists (RCOG) on a cervical stitch on their website <https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/cervical-stitch/>

Useful sources of information

Find your nearest **NHS Sexual Health Clinic**: <http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-sexual-health-clinic>

Support for parents and families of premature or sick babies: <https://www.bliss.org.uk/>

Support and information about PPROM (Premature Pre-labour Rupture of Membranes) in pregnancy: <http://www.little-heartbeats.org.uk>

Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists: "When your waters break prematurely - Patient Information Leaflet" <https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information>

Tommy's: My Prem Baby is a free app from Tommy's to track your baby from pregnancy to after birth. Available from Apple App Store and Google Play.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Author: Miss S Bisht, FM Consultant & J Ward, Specialist MW, Rainbow Team, November 2022

Amended by: C Bell, Compliance and Quality Lead, March 2024

Next review due: March 2026

Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'

You can read our maternity strategy here

