## Is prenatal screening required?

Prenatal screening is optional and parents may decline it. If considering prenatal screening of testing, parents should ask questions, such as:

- What does this test/screen measure?
- How accurate is it? Is it diagnostic?
- Is it medically necessary or just routine?
- Why should I have it?
- Would invasive follow up testing be necessary to make a diagnosis?
- What are the risks?
- Would a prenatal diagnosis impact my care or the care of my baby? (Babies with certain prenatally diagnosed conditions may be declined basic care such as fetal monitoring during labor and delivery or extraordinary care such as certain surgeries at birth.)

References on all information can be provided on request.

Resources:
John Paul II Centre for Life
Peer support for carrying to term.
National Catholic Bioethics Centre

## What If We Receive a Prenatal Diagnosis?

Receiving a prenatal diagnosis is never easy, but organisations which offer perinatal hospice services can provide invaluable spiritual, emotional, and practical support for parents carrying to term. Families who honour each moment of their babies life - no matter how frail or brief - cherish their time together.

"By saying 'yes' to life for their child, which is morally good and right, parents are placing their trust in God and embracing their child and the life of their child has been given for as long as it is given".

JOHN PAUL II CENTRE FOR LIFE
SUPPORTING LIFE, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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# Prenatal Screening

What every Catholic should know to make informed decision about prenatal care.

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# What is Prenatal Screening?

Prenatal screening is testing typically offered to expectant parents in their 1st or 2nd trimester of pregnancy. The intent is to determine the probability that the baby has a chromosomal anomaly such as trisomy 21 (Down syndrome), trisomy 18 (Edwards syndrome), trisomy 13 (Patau syndrome), a neural tube defect like anencephaly or spina bifida, or other anomalies.

## Common types of prenatal screening include:

Cell-free fetal DNA testing - also called Noninvasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) - screens fetal DNA in the mothers blood for chromosomal anomalies in the baby.

Fetal nuchal translucency (NT) ultrasound to detect probability of Down syndrome. 9-13 weeks.
Maternal serum blood screening, which measures 3-4 specific proteins and hormones in the mothers blood. May be called a triple screen, quad screen or multiple marker screening test. 15-20 weeks.
Structural ultrasound, also called fetal morphology or anomaly scan, a sonogram to measure baby's organs and structures.

Note: Ultrasound is often diagnostic for structural issues; parents must be aware of that in order to give informed consent to "rountine" ultrasounds. 18-20 weeks.

## Is Prenatal Screening Diagnostic?

No. Noninvasive screening tests may indicate a probability or risk score that a baby has a chromosomal anomaly, but a definitive diagnosis can only be made through amniocentesis or CVS (Chronic villus sampling), invasive tests that carry a slight risk of causing a miscarriage. Unfortunately parents are not always aware, adequately informed that screening tests are not diagnostic, and they may not fully understand to what they are consenting to.

## How Accurate is Noninvasive Prenatal Testing?

NIPT screening tests are name brand tests that are marketed to both doctors and expectant parents as being "up to 99% accurate". However, independent laboratory studies have found that ***a positive result from an NIPT test can be incorrect 50% of the time or more***. There is also growing evidence that screening tests may deliver "false negatives" - in which the baby does in fact have chromosomal condition that was not detected.

In addition, in the US, NIPTs are not FDA approved or regulated, meaning that FDA experts have not reviewed them for safety or effectiveness, nor verified manufacturer claims about accuracy.

## What is Church Teaching on Prenatal Testing & Diagnosis?

Although prenatal screening/testing is not expressly prohibited, Catholics are strongly warned against an underlying "eugenic intention...that presumes to measure the value of human life only within the parameters of 'normality" and states "a diagnosis... must not be the equivalent of a death sentence."

## What is the Link Between Prenatal Testing & Abortion?

Most parents undergo prenatal screening or testing with no plan to abort based on the results, however, 80% of parents who are told their unborn baby has a severe congenital anomaly decide to abort.
Pressure to abort quickly is often intense, and is frequently couched in euphemisms like "saying an early goodbye", "early induction", and "preventing suffering". Parents may be rushed through the abortion process before they have time to make a sound moral judgement. Catholic teaching is absolutely clear that procured abortion is always gravely immoral, and that even serious and tragic reasons "can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being".