

# Pregnancy Testing Before Anesthesia and Surgery

At University of Washington Medical Center

This handout explains why we advise pregnancy testing 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?

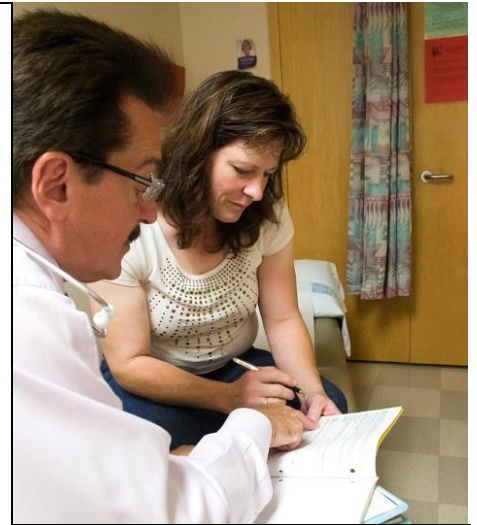
We usually use a urine sample for this test. If you cannot provide a urine sample, we will draw a small sample of your blood to test.

## 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

But, more recent studies (1990 onwards) have other results. If the patient is healthy and it is not an emergency surgery, there may not be any harm to the fetus.



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

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### UW Medicine

Harborview Medical Center – Northwest Hospital & Medical Center

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University of Washington Physicians

Seattle, Washington

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Even though studies done on animals show that it may be best not to have surgery in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of pregnancy, as it may affect behavior and learning in young animals, the best available evidence in humans suggest that a brief, single exposure is not linked with brain toxicity.

In all, we do not know exactly how anesthesia may affect a growing human fetus. We also do not know how it may affect the progress of a pregnancy or the future development of an infant.

## 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 (the result is *positive*), 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 pregnancy test are strictly private. We will not share them with anyone other than you and your care providers, unless you tell us otherwise.

## What if I choose not to have this test?

You may decide not to have this test. This means that you will not know about a possible early pregnancy.

<p><b>Questions?</b></p> <p>Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.</p> <p>Pre-Anesthesia Clinic 206.598.6334</p> <p>Maternal Infant Care Clinic 206.598.4070</p>
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<p><b>Do we have your permission to do a pregnancy test on the day of your surgery?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I want to have a pregnancy test</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, I do not want to have a pregnancy test</p> <p><b>Please sign and date here:</b></p> <p>_____ Signature</p> <p>_____ Date</p>
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