



## Suspected Ectopic Pregnancy

### What is Ectopic Pregnancy?

When a woman is pregnant, the fertilized egg usually travels through the fallopian tube into the uterus, where it attaches itself to the uterine wall and begins to grow. In an ectopic pregnancy, the egg fails to reach the uterus and begins to grow in the fallopian tube. Because the tube is very narrow, the pregnancy can only grow to about the size of a walnut before the wall of the tube bursts. This can cause heavy internal bleeding or even death. That is why it is so important to treat ectopic pregnancy as soon as it is detected.

### Who is at risk?

Ectopic pregnancies may be difficult to diagnose, and the causes are not always known. Women who have had certain medical conditions may be more likely to have one. These conditions include:

- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) or salpingitis
- Previous ectopic pregnancy
- Infertility
- Pelvic or abdominal surgery (i.e. appendectomy)
- Endometriosis
- Failure of birth control method – especially tubal sterilization, intrauterine device (IUD), or contraceptive implants

### Symptoms

Because ectopic pregnancy can occur without much warning, you must call your health care provider **IMMEDIATELY** if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- **Vaginal bleeding** different from your period – it may be lighter or heavier than usual.
- **Abdominal pain** – it may be sharp and sudden, or it may come and go. Usually pain occurs on one side of your lower abdomen.
- **Back and/or Shoulder pain** – blood from a ruptured tube can build up in the abdomen and irritate the diaphragm (the partition between your chest and abdomen) to cause pain felt in the back or shoulder.
- **Weakness, dizziness, or fainting**

### Diagnosis

Special tests can be done to determine whether or not your pregnancy is ectopic. These tests include:

- Quantitative blood tests that measure the levels of pregnancy hormone to determine if the levels are increasing normally. If the test results are not normal, the pregnancy is more likely to be either a threatened miscarriage or an ectopic pregnancy
- An ultrasound exam performed by your own OB/GYN or a hospital clinic to determine for certain whether or not there is a pregnancy present in your uterus. If you are early in pregnancy and the pregnancy was not seen by ultrasound, you may be asked to watch your symptoms and repeat the ultrasound in a week or two.

### Treatment

If an ectopic pregnancy is diagnosed, your physician will determine the appropriate treatment. Treatment may involve medication or hospitalization and surgery.

*Adapted from "Suspected Ectopic Pregnancy" published by the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology.*