

Doctors for Choice UK Position Statement: Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT)

August 2020

Non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) is a relatively new form of prenatal testing that screens for certain genetic conditions such as Down's and Edwards's Syndrome with a greater accuracy than standard screening tests. It is done using a maternal blood sample, meaning it is non-invasive and avoids the risks associated with standard diagnostic tests such as chorionic villus sampling (CVS) and amniocentesis. Currently NIPT is only available privately, however, it is thought that it will soon be available on the NHS. As for all antenatal screening tests, NIPT would be optional (some women and pregnant people choose to opt-out of all screening tests).

Doctors for Choice UK welcomes the plans to make NIPT available on the NHS and indeed any intervention that enhances and widens reproductive and healthcare choice. We recognise the many advantages of NIPT including greater accuracy, avoidance of the risks associated with invasive diagnostic tests (the main risk being miscarriage), and earlier pregnancy duration at which accurate testing can be performed (meaning that for those who choose to have an abortion this can be performed earlier). It can also allow more time to prepare for a child with a potential disability for those who choose to continue a pregnancy on receiving an abnormal test result.

Whilst acknowledging that people born with some genetic conditions can lead happy and meaningful lives and contribute greatly to society, Doctors for Choice UK believes that reproductive choice and bodily autonomy is paramount. Furthermore, although there is a wide variation in clinical outcomes associated with different prenatal diagnoses, many carry a risk of potential or inevitable severe disability and in some cases, of stillbirth or neonatal death. A prenatal diagnosis can therefore have huge potential impacts on the pregnant person and their family which can be far-reaching and lifelong.

Decisions about abortion in the context of fetal abnormality, often in what is a much-wanted pregnancy, can be extremely difficult. We feel that individual women/pregnant people are best placed to decide the right course of action for themselves and their family and should have the freedom to act on this decision without being judged. Furthermore, we believe that pre- and post-test counselling involving balanced and accurate information provision, as well as the availability of specialist support services are of vital importance.

Please also see our position statement on fetal abnormality.