



The Dudley Group
NHS Foundation Trust

Preterm Birth Prevention Clinic

Maternity Department
Patient Information Leaflet

What is a preterm birth?

Most pregnancies last between 37 and 42 weeks. Preterm birth is when a baby is born before 37 full weeks of pregnancy.

There are 60,000 babies born preterm every year in the UK. The earlier a baby is born, the higher the risk is of health problems.

Why have I been referred?

The clinic aims to provide extra care for women who may have a higher risk of having a baby born too early.

This can be for a number of reasons, such as:

- A previous birth before 34 weeks.
- In a previous pregnancy, the 'waters' (amniotic sac) have broken before 34 weeks.
- Previous surgery to the cervix after an abnormal smear test.
- An unusually shaped womb (uterus).
- A previous caesarean section performed when the cervix is fully dilated.

Being told you are at a higher risk of preterm birth can be shocking and distressing, but we would like to reassure you by offering you regular appointments in our specialist Preterm Birth Prevention Clinic.

If you have one or more of these risk factors, it does not necessarily mean that you will have a preterm birth.

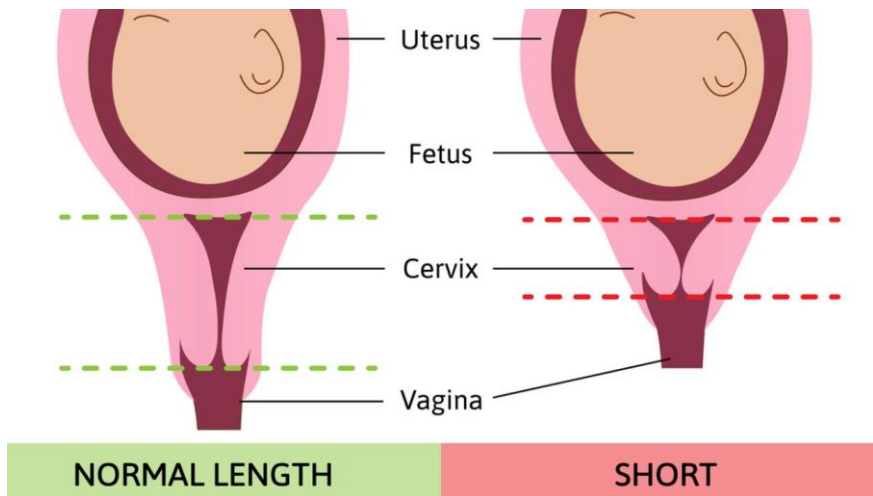
What will happen when I visit the clinic?

You will be seen by a consultant obstetrician, accompanied by either a midwife or a maternity support worker.

They will look at what happened during your previous pregnancy and decide whether you are likely to benefit from treatment or interventions to help prevent a preterm birth in your current pregnancy.

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

- A urine test and / or a vaginal swab (taken using a speculum) to check for infection, because some infections can make a preterm birth more likely.
- A trans-vaginal scan where, with your consent, the sonographer will put an ultrasound probe into your vagina to measure the length of your cervix. A short cervix increases your risk of preterm birth (see diagram below).



(Image courtesy of www.sitarambhartia.org)

What treatment will I be offered?

There are a number of treatments which we may offer you to prevent preterm birth. These include one or more of the following:

- Cervical cerclage - this where a stitch is put around the neck of your womb. A cervical stitch is usually put in between 12 and 24 weeks of pregnancy and then removed at 36 to 37 weeks unless you go into labour before this.
- Progesterone pessaries (a hormone tablet you insert into your vagina). Evidence suggests that this reduces preterm birth in women in whom the cervix is short, even if they have no other reason to think that they are at risk of preterm birth.
- A combination of cerclage and pessaries.
- Antibiotics to treat any infection.
- If we suspect that you may be in preterm labour, we may recommend vaginal swab testing for fetal fibronectin (fFN). This test can help us to assess the likelihood of you giving birth in the next week or two.
- In preparation for a planned or unplanned preterm birth, we recommend giving you steroid injections to help to prepare your baby's lungs for birth.
- We will encourage you to express some colostrum (the first breast milk produced during pregnancy and immediately after the birth) for your baby. Colostrum is extremely rich in growth and protective factors. These help to develop babies' immature systems and protect them from infection and the complications of preterm birth. Our infant feeding specialists are available to guide and support you with this.

Is there anything I can do to reduce the risk?

If you smoke, it is extremely important that you stop.

Smoking during pregnancy approximately doubles the risk of preterm birth and can seriously affect the function of the placenta and the baby's growth.

We have a dedicated Healthy Pregnancy Support Service (HPSS) that can help you to stop smoking by providing support and nicotine replacement therapies.

Your community midwife can refer you or you can refer yourself by one of the following options:

- Call: 01384 244358
- Email: dgft.hpss@nhs.net
- Go to 'The Dudley Healthy Pregnancy Support Service' page on Facebook

When to seek advice

The following symptoms before 37 weeks of pregnancy could be signs that you are about to go into labour:

- An increase in pelvic pressure within the vagina or rectum.
- An increase in discharge and / or a gush / repeat trickling of fluid, which could mean that your waters have broken (preterm premature rupture of membranes).
- Bleeding or losing your mucus plug.
- Period type pains in your abdomen or lower back. These may have a rhythm or be constant.

If you have any of these symptoms, please call Maternity Triage on **01384 456111 ext 3053**.

Useful sources of information

Cervical stitch information:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pregnancy/pi-cervical-stitch-large-print.pdf>

Preterm birth information:

<https://www.tommys.org/pregnancy-information/premature-birth>

Antenatal steroids information:

<http://www.rcog.org.uk/womens-health/clinical-guidance/corticosteroids>

Buccal colostrum leaflet:

<http://swmnodn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Buccal-Colostrum-leaflets-2020-v1.pdf>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Maternity Triage on 01384 456111 ext 3053

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/maternity/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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