

Pregnancy of Unknown Location

At FirstScan @ Window to the Womb we understand that receiving news about a 'Pregnancy of Unknown Location' can seem confusing. The aim of this information is to try and make things clearer after the sonographer has told you about our diagnosis of a Pregnancy of Unknown Location (PUL).

It is very difficult to understand how you can have a positive pregnancy test and yet we ask you to wait until at least 6 weeks for a scan. At 6 weeks of pregnancy the baby only measures 4mm so any earlier can make it very difficult to give you a clear answer. If women arrive at our clinic and are only 4 or 5 weeks pregnant by dates, it is often just too early for an ultrasound scan to diagnose what is happening or is going to happen.

So let's try to explain how you can have a positive pregnancy test and not be able to see the baby on scan yet? There are three possibilities:

- You may be very early into your pregnancy. It is normal not to have clarity on a scan until about 6 weeks of pregnancy. Ultrasound can only be accurate to within 5 days before 6 weeks and although you know precisely the 1st day of your last period we can never be absolutely sure when you ovulated and so dating a pregnancy between 4 and 6 weeks is not as accurate as after 6 weeks of pregnancy.
- You may have had an early miscarriage. If you have had pain/bleeding (and even if you haven't) before attending the clinic, it may be that sadly the pregnancy has ended. A pregnancy test can stay positive for up to 3 weeks following an early miscarriage as it takes this time for your hormones to settle down completely.
- A small number of women with a PUL will be diagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy. Your sonographer will have looked for an ectopic pregnancy but it is often not possible to identify one
The aim of being cautious in how we look after you is to ensure we care for you safely and exclude an ectopic.

What is an ectopic pregnancy?

This is where the pregnancy grows outside of the womb (most commonly in a fallopian tube) where the pregnancy is often so small it cannot be seen on scan. There is not enough room in a tube for the pregnancy to grow, and the blood supply is not the same as in the womb, so a pregnancy tends to grow very slowly. An ectopic pregnancy will sadly always be a pregnancy that will not survive.