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NICE recommends four tests to help diagnose pre-eclampsia

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Four tests that measure the level of placental growth factor (PLGF) in the blood of women who are pregnant should be used to help diagnose pre-eclampsia in England, NICE has said in new draft diagnostic guidance.¹

The tests can be used between 20 and 36 weeks and six days of pregnancy in non-specialist maternity units, according to the guidance. Abnormally low PLGF can be an indicator that the placenta is not developing properly and help midwives and doctors decide who needs to be admitted to hospital for monitoring.

Testing may particularly benefit groups at higher risk of severe adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as women from African, Caribbean, and Asian family backgrounds, says the guidance.

Testing should happen just once when a woman presents with possible symptoms of pre-eclampsia, says NICE, as there is not enough evidence on whether tests should be repeated after an initial negative result.

The four tests recommended are DELFIA Xpress PLGF 1-2-3, DELFIA Xpress sFlt-1/Xpress PLGF1-2-3 ratio, Elecsys immunoassay sFlt-1/PLGF ratio, and Triage PLGF Test.

NICE had previously recommended two of the tests to help rule out pre eclampsia. But they were not recommended to help diagnose (rule in) pre-eclampsia because of concerns that this could result in women being unnecessarily offered early births. However, the data now show that this is not the case, says the guidance.

NICE says that the tests may work differently in women who are pregnant with more than one baby and has recommended further research in this group.

Jeanette Kusel, acting director for MedTech and digital at NICE, said, “These tests represent a step change in the management and treatment of pre-eclampsia. New evidence presented to the committee shows that these tests can help successfully diagnose pre-eclampsia, alongside clinical information for decision making, rather than just rule it out.

“This is valuable to doctors and expectant mothers as now they can have increased confidence in their treatment plans and preparing for a safe birth.”

The consultation on the draft recommendation is open until 19 April 2022.

¹ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Diagnostics consultation document PLGF-based testing to help diagnose suspected preterm pre-eclampsia (update of DG23). www.nice.org.uk/guidance/indevelopment/gid-dg10040.