

Checking if you are pregnant before having an X-ray

Department of Radiology

Information for Patients

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What are the risks from X-rays to an unborn baby?

X-rays are a type of radiation that can pass through the body.

We have to be very careful about X-rays during pregnancy. This is because an unborn baby is more sensitive to radiation than an adult.

X-rays during pregnancy don't increase the risk of miscarriage or cause problems in the unborn baby, such as birth defects and physical or mental development problems.

However, if an unborn baby is exposed to radiation there is a very small increased risk that the baby may go on to develop cancer in childhood. This is why the dose of radiation used in an X-ray is always as low as possible.

What happens if I am pregnant, or might be pregnant?

It is OK for you to have an X-ray of parts of your body away from your tummy, such as the head, chest, arms or lower legs, as the radiation does not go near the baby. We need to take special care if you need an X-ray of your tummy or near to your womb.

If you are pregnant or could be pregnant, we will talk to the doctor looking after you to decide if your X-ray examination should be delayed.

Your doctor may recommend that you have the X-ray examination if it is essential to diagnose and treat your illness, to keep you and your unborn baby healthy.

Sometimes there may be a choice of tests which can be done to diagnose your illness. The decision on which test is safest to do may depend on how many weeks pregnant you are.

If the health benefit to you clearly outweighs the small radiation risk to your baby, the X-ray may go ahead after we have talked to you about all the options.

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Procedure that we follow to check if you might be pregnant

There are rules that we must follow for all X-ray examinations. These are called Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2017 (IR(ME)R 2017).

These rules say that there must be a way to check if someone having an X-ray examination might be pregnant. This applies to all female patients of childbearing age (10 to 55 years) who are to have an X-ray examination of the tummy (abdomen) or hip (pelvis) area.

The person doing each X-ray examination is legally responsible for checking whether or not the person having the X-ray is, or may be pregnant.

We do not need to check if someone is pregnant if they are having X-rays of their head, chest, arms or lower legs.

This procedure also applies to you if you are:

- a transgender female age 10 to 55 years.
- a transgender male age 10 to 55 years, and registered with the hospital as a female.

This procedure does not apply to you if you are a transgender male and registered as a male. If you are a transgender male age 10 to 55 years, and registered with the hospital as a male, we will not ask you about the possibility of pregnancy unless you tell us that there is a chance that you could be pregnant.

When you come for an X-ray examination medical staff will ask you some questions. This is so we can check if there is any chance that you might be pregnant.

Depending on your age, we will ask you if you are pregnant or if there is any chance that you could be pregnant, or if your monthly periods have started or stopped. If you are not sure whether or not you are pregnant, or if pregnancy cannot be ruled out we will ask you for the date of your last period.

If there is no possibility of you being pregnant then the examination may go ahead. You will be asked to sign a form to confirm that you are not pregnant.

Procedure for examinations which give a low dose of X-rays

Low dose X-ray examinations include X-rays of the abdomen, lower back and hips, barium meal and swallow test, and some X-ray treatment procedures that do not X-ray the womb.

These examinations or procedures can go ahead if your period is not overdue.

Procedure for examinations which give a higher dose of X-rays - 10 day rule

Higher dose examinations include CT scans of the abdomen and pelvis, and complex X-ray treatments or procedures that X-ray the womb. For these examinations we follow the 10 day rule as explained below:

If the first day of your last period was within 10 days ago, the X-ray examination can go ahead.

If the first day of your last period was more than 10 days ago, the X-ray examination can go ahead if:

- you have had a hysterectomy.
- you are sterilised.
- you have not had a period for 2 years (you are 2 years post menopausal).
- there is no chance of you being pregnant.

If the first day of your last period was more than 10 days ago and you cannot confirm that you are not pregnant, then the need for the examination will be considered by a doctor who specialises in X-rays (radiologist) and your referring doctor. They will decide whether to:

- delay the examination and re-arrange when you can confirm that you are not pregnant.
- cancel the examination.
- go ahead with the examination.

Considering the need for the examination

The radiologist and your referring doctor will discuss whether the benefit of doing the X-ray examination outweighs the possible risk to your unborn baby.

If they decide that it is important that the examination takes place straight away, then they can over-rule the pregnancy checking procedure and the examination may go ahead.

Before you agree to have the X-ray examination, the doctor will talk to you about the risks and benefits of having the examination. This is to give you all the information you need to make a decision.

If possible, the radiologist and your referring doctor may consider a different type of examination that does not use X-rays.

Procedure for female patients age 10 to 16 years

If we need to check with a child if they could be pregnant before an X-ray, we must first check and decide if the child can understand why and what we are asking them. We must also decide if they understand that it is important to give a truthful answer.

We follow the Fraser guidelines to help us. These guidelines are used to check if a child has the maturity to make their own decisions and understand the implications of those decisions.

We first ask the child if their periods have started. If so, we will explain the possible risks from X-rays to an unborn baby, and ask if there is any chance of them being pregnant.

If we think a child age 10 to 16 years understands our questions and explanations, we will ask them without their parent or carer being in the room.

If we think a child age 10 to 16 years does not understand our questions and explanations (for example a child who has a learning disability or special educational needs), we will ask their parent or carer.

If we cannot confirm that a child is not pregnant, the radiologist and referring doctor will decide if the X-ray examination needs to be done that day, or if it can be done at another time when we are sure that the child is not pregnant.

References:

<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/pregnancy/can-i-have-an-x-ray-if-i-am-pregnant/>

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
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