

News

Abortion fears over test that tells women baby's sex at 7 weeks

Officials fear check for Down's syndrome could be abused by those seeking sex-selective terminations

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GOVERNMENT officials are concerned that a blood test for Down's syndrome could be used by women who want to find out the sex of their baby and then abort the foetus.

A Department of Health review into "sex selective" abortions found that a simple blood test for genetic abnormalities is being used to determine a baby's gender and needs to be monitored because it may be used by women who may wish to terminate a pregnancy because of the foetus's sex.

Until recently, women at high risk of having children with conditions such as Down's syndrome were offered a procedure in which a needle is inserted into the womb, which could cause a miscarriage.

The review, which was carried out as part of an assessment of abortions because of the sex of the foetus, found that the blood test - known as NIPT - has become "the main technological development enabling women to learn the gender of their foetus".

The report said "the emergence of

NIPT tests underlines the need for us to continue to monitor birth ratios and abortions by ethnicity to assess the impact of these tests, particularly if they become more widely available in the coming years".

Typically, women are only able to find out the sex of their foetus when they have a scan at around 18 or 20 weeks. According to the government review, the NIPT test can be carried out from seven weeks.

Some MPs and campaigners have raised concerns that sex selective abortion are being carried out in Britain.

In 2012, *The Daily Telegraph* filmed doctors offering to arrange terminations after being told a woman did not want to go ahead with the pregnancy because of the sex of the unborn child.

Earlier this week, it emerged that one of the doctors named by this newspaper - who admitted that the abortion he was offering was tantamount to "female infanticide" - has been struck off by a medical tribunal for three months.

The Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service ruled that Dr Palaniappan Rajmohan lied about the reasons he carried out the termination.

The prenatal blood test is available on the NHS and privately. If parents choose to go to a private clinic, the test starts at about £300.

One doctor who runs a clinic in York said that all the women who had asked for the blood test had done so because they were concerned about genetic

abnormalities, rather than the sex of the foetus. However, in the last year, he said that half of the women he had tested said they also wanted to know the sex of the baby.

This newspaper has found evidence that some women in Britain are using the blood test purely to determine the sex of their baby.

One British woman wrote on a pregnancy forum: "Well as I'm so impatient I'm having a gender DNA test next week! They take the blood from arm like a regular test and you get results in 48 hours!"

A week later, the woman posts a comment on another forum and describes how she had the test in Spain.

A second woman, from Hampshire, asked others on an online forum if they thought she was "crazy" for spending £499 to test for gender at ten weeks.

She wrote: "Do you think I'm crazy wanting to spend £499 on this just so I can find out the gender at 10 weeks as opposed to paying for a gender scan at 16 weeks for £79? I can't really afford it but I'm so desperate to know."

Another woman posted that she was considering having the test to find out the sex of her baby after a friend had one "but not for trisomy test [for Down's syndrome] but to find out gender".

A spokesman for the Department of Health said that the NHS only offered NIPT testing to determine genetic disorders.