

Doctors for Choice UK Position Statement

None Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT)

NIPT is a relatively new form of prenatal testing that screens for certain genetic conditions such as Down's and Edwards's Syndromes with a greater accuracy than standard screening tests. It is done using a maternal blood sample, meaning it is non-invasive and avoids the risks associated with standard diagnostic tests such as chorionic villus sampling (CVS) and amniocentesis. Currently NIPT is only available privately; however it is thought that it will soon be available on the NHS. As for all antenatal screening tests, NIPT would be optional (with many pregnant women already choosing to opt-out of screening tests).

Doctors for Choice UK welcomes the plans to make NIPT available on the NHS and indeed any intervention that enhances and widens reproductive and healthcare choice. We recognise the many advantages of NIPT including greater accuracy, avoidance of the risks associated with invasive diagnostic tests (the main risk being miscarriage) and earlier gestation at which accurate testing can be performed (meaning that for women who choose to have an abortion this can be performed earlier). It can also allow more time to prepare for a child with a disability for those who choose to continue a pregnancy after receiving a positive test result.

Whilst acknowledging that people born with some genetic conditions can lead happy and meaningful lives and contribute greatly to society, Doctors for Choice UK believes that reproductive choice and bodily autonomy is paramount. Furthermore, although there is a wide variation in clinical prognoses associated with different genetic conditions, some prenatal diagnoses are associated with inevitable severe disability or a considerable risk of stillbirth or neonatal death (with significant psychological distress for women).

Decisions about abortion in the context of fetal abnormality, often in what is a much-wanted pregnancy, can be extremely difficult. We feel that individual women are best placed to decide the right course of action for themselves and their families and should have the freedom to act on this decision without being judged. Furthermore, we believe that pre and post-test counselling involving balanced and accurate information provision, as well as the availability of specialist support services are of vital importance.