BirthX

BIRTHX BLOG · PRINTABLE GUIDE

First Trimester Tests

WEEKS 1–13

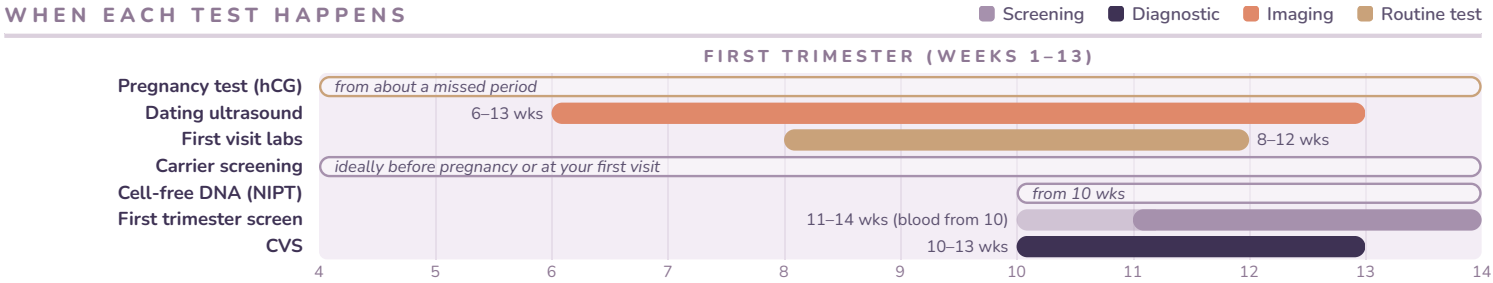
What each test checks for, when it happens, and what the results can and can't tell you.

Routine tests like blood work, a urine test and a dating ultrasound are part of care for everyone.

Screening tests estimate the chance of a condition. A high-chance result means more testing may be offered, not a diagnosis. **Diagnostic tests** give a more definite answer.

Genetic testing is your choice. It's offered to everyone, at any age, and you can choose some tests, all of them, or none. A genetic counselor can help you decide.

WHEN EACH TEST HAPPENS



THE TESTS

ROUTINE TEST

Pregnancy test (hCG)

From about the time of a missed period

A home urine test or a blood test detects hCG, a hormone made soon after implantation.

Checks for: Whether you're pregnant. A blood test can also measure the exact amount of hCG.

ROUTINE TEST

First visit blood work

At your first prenatal visit, often 8–12 weeks

A set of blood tests, sometimes called a prenatal panel.

Checks for: Blood type and Rh factor, antibodies, anemia, rubella immunity, hepatitis B and C, HIV and syphilis. Sometimes blood sugar or thyroid too.

Good to know: The CDC recommends hepatitis C testing in every pregnancy. If you're Rh-negative, you'll likely be offered Rh immune globulin later on.

ROUTINE TEST

Urine test

First visit, then at many visits

A urine sample, checked at many appointments.

Checks for: Urinary tract infections, plus protein and sugar.

Good to know: Bladder infections are treated even without symptoms because they can lead to kidney infections.

ROUTINE TEST

STI tests and Pap test

Usually at your first visit

A swab or urine sample for STIs, and a Pap test if you're due for one.

Checks for: Chlamydia and gonorrhea, based on your age and risk, plus cervical cell changes.

Good to know: These tests are quick, and most infections are easily treated.

IMAGING ROUTINE

Dating ultrasound

Usually 6–13 weeks

Often **transvaginal** early on: a slim, covered wand is placed gently in the vagina for a clearer picture. It may feel like pressure but shouldn't hurt. You can ask to insert it yourself.

Checks for: Your due date, baby's heartbeat and how many babies you're carrying.

Good to know: A first trimester ultrasound is the most accurate way to set your due date.

SCREENING OPTIONAL

First trimester screen

Usually 11–14 weeks (blood draw from 10)

An ultrasound measuring fluid at the back of baby's neck (nuchal translucency), plus a blood test for PAPP-A and hCG.

Checks for: The chance of Down syndrome, trisomy 18 and trisomy 13.

Good to know: It's a screen, not a diagnosis. Many practices offer cell-free DNA instead of, or along with, it.

SCREENING OPTIONAL

Carrier screening

Ideally before pregnancy, or at your first visit

A blood or saliva test that checks whether you carry a gene for certain inherited conditions.

Checks for: ACOG recommends offering everyone screening for cystic fibrosis, spinal muscular atrophy, and blood conditions like sickle cell disease and thalassemia.

Good to know: Most carriers are healthy. If you're a carrier, your partner may be offered testing too.

SCREENING OPTIONAL

Cell-free DNA (NIPT)

Any time from 10 weeks

A blood test that looks at small pieces of placental DNA in your bloodstream.

Checks for: The chance of Down syndrome and other chromosome conditions. It can also show baby's sex, so say so if you'd rather not know.

Good to know: The most accurate screen for Down syndrome, but still not a diagnosis. A "no-call" result isn't a high-chance result.

DIAGNOSTIC OPTIONAL

CVS

Usually 10–13 weeks

Chorionic villus sampling takes a small sample of placental tissue through your cervix or belly.

Checks for: Chromosome and some genetic conditions.

Good to know: Gives a more definite answer earlier than amniocentesis, with a small risk of miscarriage. Anyone can choose it, with or without screening first.

Questions to ask before any test

"Is this a screening or a diagnostic test?"

"What are the risks?"

"Is it covered by my insurance?"

"What will the results tell us, and what won't they?"

"When and how will I get my results?"

"What happens if the result is abnormal?"

"Would the results change my care?"

Sources: MedlinePlus; Children's Hospital of Philadelphia; CDC; ACOG; Quest Diagnostics. For education only; not a substitute for medical advice.

Read the full article: birthx.org/blog/first-trimester-tests