



Alpha-Fetoprotein Test (AFP)

Why is the alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) screening test offered?

AFP testing is generally offered to screen for Open Neural Tube defects. The 20 week Complete Anatomic Fetal Survey also screens for Open Neural Tube defects.

What is an alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) screening test?

Alpha-fetoprotein screening is a blood test that checks the level of alpha-fetoprotein in the mothers' blood during pregnancy. AFP is a protein normally made by the baby's liver. It is found in the fluid surrounding the baby in the womb (amniotic fluid). AFP goes through the placenta into the mother's blood. The AFP blood test is called MSAFP (maternal serum AFP).

Too much or too little AFP may also be a sign of:

- Down syndrome
- Other chromosomal abnormalities
- Defects in the abdominal wall of the baby
- There is an association between abnormal AFP and pre-eclampsia and intrauterine growth restriction but it is only an association, it does not mean you will develop any of those problems.

How is an alpha-fetoprotein screening test done?

In most cases, an alpha-fetoprotein test is done this way:

- Blood is usually taken from a vein between the 15th and 20th weeks of pregnancy.

What are the risks and benefits of an alpha-fetoprotein screening test?

Risks	Benefits
<p>A multiple marker screening test is not diagnostic and there can be false positives as well as false negatives. All patients are screened for neural tube defects at the 20 week ultrasound, which is a more accurate screening test. If your 20 week ultrasound is normal and you have an abnormal AFP test then we will recommend increased screening with ultrasounds and possible fetal monitoring. This can cause more anxiety for some patients and is a reason some people prefer not to have this test performed.</p>	<p>The purpose of this screening test is to find out which women have a higher risk of having a baby with a birth defect. It is also used to find the women who need additional testing during pregnancy. Without the AFP test, some women would not be given additional testing.</p> <p>If the AFP test is abnormal we would refer you to UVMMC for your Fetal Anatomic Survey at 20 weeks.</p>