SOGC Releases Guidelines on Prenatal Genetic Screening

Ottawa - The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) today released a new guideline on prenatal genetic testing. The Society recommends that every Canadian woman, regardless of her age, be offered the choice to undergo non-invasive genetic screening during her pregnancy.

The guideline, published in the February issue of the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada (JOGC), provides direction for Canadian healthcare professionals on the use of prenatal genetic testing. The guideline is based on a review of the best scientific evidence available and is authored by leading physicians working in this area.

“This new guideline recommends that the decision to offer genetic testing should no longer be based solely on the fact that a woman is over 35,” said Dr. Donald Davis, President of the SOGC. “With the availability of ultrasound and blood testing, more women can be offered the choice to access this testing. In fact, it is our assertion that increasing access to non-invasive testing methods by more pregnant women will result in fewer invasive procedures such as amniocentesis being performed.”

The results of this screening, combined with other factors, can then further inform a healthcare professional’s decision to offer appropriate counseling or further screening using invasive methods such as amniocentesis or chorionic villi sampling.

The guideline also recognizes the need for appropriate and sensitive health counseling following positive screening for chromosomal anomalies. It recommends that: “screening programs should show respect for the needs and quality of life of persons with disabilities. Counselling should be nondirective and should respect a woman’s choice to accept or to refuse any or all of the testing or options offered at any point in the process”.

“Finding out that your child may have a genetic disorder is an unexpected event for a parent,” said Dr. Jo-Ann Johnson, a member of the committee that produced the guideline and a Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Calgary. “Having the option to access this information early in pregnancy means that women and their families have time to prepare, to collect information, and to receive balanced health counselling prior to delivery.”

Advance identification of a genetic disorder may also require special care and considerations to ensure a safe pregnancy and birth. Women and their healthcare professionals may need to make special preparations for potential complications such as congenital heart defects. It may also influence a woman’s decision about where to give
birth, as a larger hospital may be better equipped to provide the safest delivery of a child with a genetic disorder.

**Selected Recommendations from the Guideline:**

- All pregnant women in Canada, regardless of age, should be offered through an informed consent process a prenatal screening test for the most common clinically significant fetal aneuploidies in addition to a second trimester ultrasound for dating, growth, and anomalies.
- Maternal age screening is a poor minimum standard for prenatal screening for aneuploidy and should be removed as an indication for invasive testing. Amniocentesis/chorionic villi sampling (CVS) should not be provided without multiple marker screening results except for women over the age of 40. Patients should be counselled accordingly.
- Health care providers should be aware of the screening modalities available in their province or territory.
- Screening programs should be implemented with resources that support audited screening and diagnostic laboratory services, ultrasound, genetic counselling services, patient and health care provider education, and high quality diagnostic testing, as well as resources for administration, annual clinical audit, and data management. In addition, there must be the flexibility and funding to adjust the program to new technology and protocols.
- Screening programs should show respect for the needs and quality of life of persons with disabilities. Counselling should be nondirective and should respect a woman’s choice to accept or to refuse any or all of the testing or options offered at any point in the process.

**Contact:**

**Nancy Bickford**  
Acting Director, Communications and Public Education  
Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)  
Tel: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192, extension 330  
Fax: (613) 730-4314  
Email: nbickford@sogc.com | Web: [www.sogc.org](http://www.sogc.org)

**Mike Haymes**  
Editor, Communications and Public Education  
Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC)  
Tel: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192, extension 325  
Fax: (613) 730-4314  
Email: mhaymes@sogc.com | Web: [www.sogc.org](http://www.sogc.org)

**About the SOGC**

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) is one of Canada’s oldest national specialty organizations. Established in 1944, the Society’s mission is to promote excellence in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology and to advance the health of women through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, outreach and education. The SOGC represents obstetricians/gynaecologists, family physicians, nurses, midwives
and allied health professionals working in the field of sexual reproductive health. For more information, visit www.sogc.org.

About the JOGC

Administered by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC), the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada (JOGC) is Canada's peer-reviewed journal of obstetrics, gynaecology, and women's health. Each monthly issue contains original research articles, reviews, case reports, commentaries, and editorials on all aspects of reproductive health. JOGC is the original publication source of evidence-based clinical guidelines, committee opinions, and policy statements that derive from standing or ad hoc committees of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada. JOGC is included in the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE database, and abstracts from JOGC are accessible on PubMed.

Additional resources on prenatal genetic screening:

Public Health Agency of Canada
- Congenital Anomalies in Canada: A Perinatal Health Report, 2002

Society Of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
- Prenatal Diagnosis
  http://www.sogc.org/health/pregnancy-prenatal_e.asp
- Statement on Access to Genetic Screening

BC Health Guide
- Genetics - Prenatal Screening and Testing
  http://www.bchealthguide.org/kbase/topic/special/tv7695/sec3.htm

Canadian Down Syndrome Society
- http://www.cdss.ca
- Position Statement – Prenatal Genetic Testing
  http://www.cdss.ca/en/about_us/policies_and_statements/prenatal_genetic_testing.htm