

# Can I Have a Diagnostic Imaging Test While I am Pregnant?

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## What are diagnostic imaging tests?

- Diagnostic imaging tests take pictures of the inside of your body. These tests include X-rays, computed tomography (CT) scans, nuclear medicine scans, ultrasounds, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).
- X-rays, CT scans, and nuclear medicine scans use radiation. High doses of radiation can be harmful to your unborn baby. There is only a small amount of radiation from these tests.
- MRI and ultrasounds **do not** use radiation.

## Why do I need to have a diagnostic imaging test?

- Your health care team may request one of these tests to check your bones, tissues, organs, or blood vessels.
- These tests can help your health care team understand your symptoms.

## **Can I have a different test that does not use radiation?**

Some tests, like ultrasounds and MRI, **do not** use radiation, but these tests may not give the information your health care team needs to understand your symptoms.

## **How much radiation is safe during pregnancy?**

- The health risks are low for small amounts of radiation.
- Everyone gets a small amount of radiation from the environment. An unborn baby gets **0.5 to 7.0 milli-Grays (mGy)** from natural background radiation. This is called the **fetal dose**.
- The **highest amount of radiation that is safe** for unborn babies and for people who are pregnant to get at one time is **50 mGy**.
- **These tests give a fetal dose well below 50 mGy:**
  - › X-rays (chest, stomach, arm, or leg)
  - › CT scans (head, chest, stomach, or pelvis [hip bone])
  - › Nuclear medicine scan (V/Q scan [Ventilation/perfusion scan])

- In some cases, a radiologist (doctor who specializes in imaging) will then decide whether it is safe for you to have the test. This decision will be based on whether:
  - › the test will give you and your unborn baby a high dose of radiation.
  - › it is early in your pregnancy. This is because your unborn baby is more sensitive to higher amounts of radiation at that time.
- The radiologist will check how much radiation a test will give and why you need the test.

## **Who will do my test?**

- A medical radiation technologist (MRT) will do your test.
- A radiologist will read the results of your test and give a diagnosis (when health care providers find out what is causing your symptoms or illness based on tests and other information collected).

## **Can I choose to wear a lead apron during the test?**

- Lead aprons are no longer used for patients because:
  - › modern equipment gives better information with less radiation.
  - › we now know more about how radiation affects the body and that reproductive organs (ovaries and testicles) are not as sensitive to radiation.
- Wearing a lead apron during diagnostic imaging does not lower the amount of radiation you get.
- If the lead apron moves and blocks the area that we need to check, we will need to do the test again. This means that you will get more radiation than if you had not worn the apron.

## **Can I ask the MRT or radiologist questions?**

Yes. If you have any questions during your test about your safety or the safety of your unborn baby, please ask the MRT or the radiologist.

## **Can I refuse to have the test?**

- Yes. You always have the right to refuse a test.
- Before you refuse, talk with your health care team about your decision. Your health care provider may want to understand your decision and talk with you about any concerns you may have.

## **What should I do if I find out I am pregnant after I have my test?**

Most tests use only a small amount of radiation. If you find out you are pregnant after you have your test and you are concerned, talk to your health care provider. Ask if the test you had may have caused any harm to you or your unborn baby.

# Notes:

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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*Prepared by: Diagnostic Imaging QI Committee, Eastern Zone*

*Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services*

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.