

Fast Facts



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**What You Should
Know About Short
Cervix & Preterm Birth**

What You Should Know About

Short Cervix & Preterm Birth

Length of the cervix varies among women, and most pregnant women with a “short” cervix will deliver full-term babies. But for moms-to-be with an at-risk medical history, a screening for short cervix may reduce the chance for early labor and birth.

What does “short cervix” mean for pregnancy?

During a normal pregnancy a woman’s cervix – located where the uterus opens to the vagina – should remain long, firm, and closed until late in the third trimester. The cervix should measure between 3 and 5 centimeters in length and should be V-shaped. When a woman’s cervix is short (measuring less than 2.5 centimeters) and shows evidence of “funneling” (changing from V-shaped to U-shaped), the pregnancy is at risk for a preterm birth.

What complications are related to short cervix?

Cervical length measurement can be a predictor of preterm labor and birth. Research shows that a short cervix in the second trimester of pregnancy means the baby can be born too early. This happens because a short cervix may efface (thin) and dilate (open) too soon. Since infants born too early may face health problems, it’s important to minimize the risk.

How is short cervix diagnosed?

A screening test with an ultrasound is the most accurate way to measure cervical length and get additional views of the cervix. Another method uses a device that looks like a long cotton swab. These procedures can normally be performed in the office of a healthcare provider.

Are all pregnant women evaluated for short cervix?

No. Measurements of cervical length are typically recommended for women who have experienced problems in previous pregnancies (such as miscarriage after the first trimester, or preterm labor or birth), are expecting twins, or have had surgery on the cervix.

What happens after short cervix is diagnosed?

If a pregnant woman’s cervix measures less than 2.5 cm, her healthcare provider may recommend additional scans, monitoring, and/or interventions as part of a plan to decrease the risk of early labor and birth. This preventive plan is individualized and may include medication, bed rest, and hydration.

What is the expectant mom’s role?

It is important for a woman who has been diagnosed with short cervix to know about warning signs such as vaginal bleeding or bloody mucus. These should be reported immediately to a healthcare provider. Awareness and talking with the provider will help to ensure the best care and outcomes for mom and baby.

