

## FETAL ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY

### **What is a fetal echocardiogram?**

A fetal echocardiogram, or fetal echo for short, is a test that uses sound waves (ultrasound) to evaluate the baby's heart while still in the womb. The test can be performed on your belly (abdominal ultrasound) or through your vagina (transvaginal ultrasound) and does not pose any risk to you or your unborn baby. The test takes, on average, about an hour.

### **What can you tell about my baby's heart?**

The test enables a more detailed image of the baby's heart. The test can show heart rhythm, blood flow and structures of the baby's heart. Many heart defects can be detected including, but not limited to, heart rhythm disturbances, congenital heart disease and arrhythmias. It is important to remember that echocardiography cannot always be used to diagnose every condition.

### **Why is this test necessary?**

There are many reasons for doing this test. Your obstetrician may recommend this test based on specific risk factors and/or if previous ultrasounds or tests detected an abnormality or other potential heart problems in your baby. Your referring physician will inform you why this test is recommended in your case.

### **Didn't they already see the heart on my ultrasound?**

The baby's heart is examined in much more detail than on a regular obstetrical ultrasound. The test is performed by a specially trained ultrasound sonographer and images are interpreted by a pediatric cardiologist who specializes in heart problems in infants, children and adolescents.

### **When is the best time to do this test?**

The test is typically done in the second trimester between 20 and 24 weeks into pregnancy. Imaging earlier in pregnancy is not recommended because the heart is too small.

### **What do I need to do to prepare?**

Check with your insurance company or primary care provider to see if you need a referral. Otherwise, no special preparation is needed for this test. You may wish to wear comfortable clothes.

### **Can my partner come too?**

Yes. Or any other person you wish to join you. It is not advisable to bring small children, unless there is someone else who can supervise them during the test. If your obstetrician thinks a serious problem is likely, we recommend that your partner accompany you.