

**Definition:** An ectopic pregnancy is a condition resulting when a pregnancy develops in a location other than within the uterus. These pregnancies happen when the fertilized egg attaches to a fallopian tube or the ovarian surface, or less commonly, to the surface of another abdominal organ. Ectopic pregnancies occur in about one per 100 pregnancies.

These unusual sites of pregnancy implantation cannot anatomically support the rapidly enlarging products of pregnancy. In the days following fertilization, stretching and subsequent tearing of the supporting tissue may lead to the rupture of these tissues and the associated blood vessels. The resulting internal bleeding can lead to major blood loss and pain which can be incapacitating.

**Warnings:** Ectopic pregnancy is an emergency situation. It can be fatal. Massive internal bleeding can occur. This heavy bleeding can lead to shock, coma and death in untreated cases.

**Findings:** Lower abdominal pain (which may be off to one side), vaginal bleeding (usually mild, if present) and a positive pregnancy test are commonly present.

**Action:** If your clinician has a concern that you might have an ectopic pregnancy or feels that you should have consultant care or specific laboratory or x-ray examination—FOLLOW THE ADVICE. The diagnosis may be incorrect, but this cannot be known until after your evaluation has been completed. Should you have an ectopic pregnancy, the chances of survival are greatest if the diagnosis is made before rupture occurs. Therefore:

1. Follow the directions given to you.
2. Go to an emergency facility as soon as possible as you are directed. It may be necessary to transport you by ambulance.

**PLEASE REMEMBER:** Ectopic pregnancy is not the most common explanation for your problem. There are other more common reasons, but ectopic pregnancy is the most serious and dangerous possibility and must be ruled out before the evaluation for your problem can be continued.

