An AFP (Alpha-fetoprotein) test is used for screening birth defects. AFP is a protein made by the growing baby during pregnancy. It passes into the mother’s bloodstream. To test AFP levels, blood is drawn from one of the mother’s veins between the 15th and the 21st week of pregnancy.

**AFP Test Results**

Most AFP test results are normal or negative. Remember that this is only a screening test. Positive (abnormal) test results alert you and your healthcare provider only that further testing may be needed. This may include an ultrasound or amniocentesis. Birth defects that may be detected include: a neural tube defect (affecting the baby’s spine and brain), abdominal wall defects, kidney problems, and Down syndrome.

Your test results can be affected if your due date is not correct or you are pregnant with twins. If your due date has changed, your healthcare provider may ask that your AFP test be recalculated.

A false negative or a false positive result can occur. Even if the test is negative a problem can be present when the baby is born. Sometimes the test is positive or abnormal and the baby is born with no problems. Be sure to talk with your healthcare provider about the result of your test and what to expect.

**Who should have this test done?**

Having an AFP test is up to you. Some facts to consider when deciding include:

- An AFP test causes no health risks to you or your baby.
- Normal AFP results do not mean for certain that the baby is healthy.
- An AFP test can only point to possible problems with the baby.
- If your test results are abnormal, other tests will need to be done to determine why the AFP result was abnormal.
- If a defect is found through further testing, you and your healthcare provider can prepare and make plans for your baby.

Talk with your healthcare provider or nurse about any questions or concerns.