

# Position Statement on Non-Invasive Prenatal Screening (NIPS)

September 2019

## Background

The National Screening Unit is aware that non-invasive prenatal screening is available for pregnant women in New Zealand. Non-invasive prenatal screening (NIPS) is a new method of screening for certain chromosomal abnormalities in a developing baby. NIPS can identify the most common chromosome conditions, including trisomy 21, 18 or 13. It cannot identify structural and non-genetic abnormalities, which are better excluded by ultrasound.

NIPS analyses DNA fragments ('cell-free DNA') found in maternal blood. During pregnancy the majority of the cell-free DNA comes from the woman, but a small proportion comes from the placenta and is known as cell-free fetal DNA.

## NSU statement

- NIPS is not part of the publicly funded antenatal screening for Down syndrome and other conditions.
- NIPS is a user pays, non-scheduled test.
- NIPS is considered a 'screening' test. It does not replace current diagnostic testing using amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling.
- The Ministry of Health is actively following international research and the implementation of NIPS in overseas screening programmes.

Currently, all pregnant women less than 20 weeks are advised of the availability of publicly funded antenatal screening for Down syndrome and other conditions. This screening has an overall detection rate of 78–84% which is similar to that expected from international studies. Initiatives to improve access, equity and overall quality of the current screening pathway in New Zealand are ongoing. Further information can be found at [www.nsu.govt.nz](http://www.nsu.govt.nz)