

Prenatal paternity testing for court: your questions answered

Casey Randall, Head of DNA at AlphaBiolabs, answers some of the most common questions about prenatal paternity testing for legal matters.



What is non-invasive prenatal paternity testing?

A non-invasive prenatal paternity test or NIPP test, is a DNA test performed while the mother is still pregnant, to verify paternity before the baby is born.

The test can be performed from as early as 7 weeks into pregnancy, right up to the point of labour, with expert geneticists examining the baby's DNA together with the parents' DNA to identify which half of the DNA is inherited from the father.

If the tested man is the biological father of the baby, both will share matching DNA markers to verify a biological relationship.

If the tested man is not the biological father, there will be significant differences between the DNA of the man and the baby.

How does the test work?

Three samples are required to perform a NIPP test:

- ▶ The man's DNA (alleged father) – collected using cheek swabs
- ▶ The pregnant woman's DNA – cheek swabs and a blood sample and
- ▶ The unborn baby's DNA – identified via the mother's blood sample

Expert geneticists extract DNA profiles from both parents' samples, and the very latest scientific techniques are used to identify the baby's DNA within the mother's blood sample; provided there is sufficient foetal DNA within the mother's blood sample, geneticists will compare the DNA profiles of the alleged father and the baby to identify matching DNA markers and establish paternity.

Although the test can be performed from as early as 7 weeks, testing later in pregnancy is the best way to obtain the highest levels of foetal DNA, and an even more conclusive result.

What are the benefits of this type of test?

There are many benefits associated with prenatal paternity testing, particularly for child welfare and protection cases. These include:

- ▶ Plans to safeguard babies who may be at risk can be developed before the baby is even born
- ▶ Local authorities can carry out assessments early in the process, including assessing the suitability of potential carers before the baby is born
- ▶ The baby can then be moved into the care of a suitable guardian immediately after the birth. This significantly reduces the costs associated with keeping the baby in the hospital or in foster care while a decision is made about their ongoing care
- ▶ The number of times the baby must be moved between carers/homes is reduced – which is much better for the baby

The test is also useful for child maintenance or custody arrangements, where the parents no longer have a relationship or the alleged father is disputing paternity, ensuring arrangements can be made for custody or child maintenance once the baby is born.

How are the DNA samples collected?

A blood sample must be collected from the mother by a trained sample collector, such as those who work in AlphaBiolabs' nationwide network, or a medical professional such as a phlebotomist, nurse, or other medical practitioner.

The blood sample must then be transported to the laboratory as quickly as possible, to avoid degradation of the sample which can render a blood sample unusable.

Cheek (buccal) DNA samples are collected from the mother and alleged father by rubbing a cheek swab quickly and painlessly on the inside of the cheek to collect DNA.

Although the cheek samples do not need to be collected at the same location, reputable testing laboratories will advise that both parents' samples should be collected around the same time, to prevent any delays to testing and analysis.

Court-approved DNA testing from AlphaBiolabs

We are the only UK laboratory to hold ISO 17025 accreditation for NIPP testing, with extensive experience providing industry leading DNA testing services for legal matters.

Our test results are accepted by family law courts, the Ministry of Justice, the Child Maintenance Service, UK Visas and Immigration and the Home Office.

We also offer the fastest DNA test results in the industry, with NIPP test results available in four-to-seven days*.

A report containing a concise summary of the results and confirmation of chain of custody procedures is included as standard.

Legal clients can claim 30% off all AlphaBiolabs court-approved DNA testing services until 31st October 2022. Simply cite DNA30 when requesting your quote.

For expert advice on which DNA test is best for your client, call our Customer Services team on 0333 600 1300 or email testing@alphabiolabs.com and a member of our Legal team will be in touch.

*Working days from when the samples arrive at our laboratory before 10am

Casey Randall, Head of DNA and Covid Testing at AlphaBiolabs

Casey joined the AlphaBiolabs team in 2012 and heads up both the DNA and Covid-19 testing teams.

An expert in DNA analysis and a member of the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG), Casey holds an MSc with Distinction in DNA Profiling and a First-Class BSc with Honours in Forensic Science.

Casey is responsible for maintaining the highest quality testing standards, as well as looking for ways to further enhance the service that AlphaBiolabs provides and exploring new and innovative techniques in DNA analysis.

For further information please contact AlphaBiolabs on 0333 600 1300, email media@alphabiolabs.com or visit www.alphabiolabs.co.uk

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