



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 11, 2012

Pro-Life Leaders Voice Concern Over Newly Announced Pre-Natal Test

A new pre-natal test that researchers say will allow doctors to screen a pre-born baby for thousands of potential genetic defects has pro-life leaders concerned that thousands more babies could be targeted for abortion. [UPI News](#) reported that the new, non-invasive test, developed by genome scientists at the University of Washington, uses a blood sample from an expectant mother and a saliva swab from the father to predict the entire DNA makeup of a pre-born baby.



Currently Down Syndrome is the only disorder for which genetic testing is currently done. But with the new science, doctors could potentially detect some 3,500 disorders. A report published in the journal *Science Translational Medicine* said that the reconstructed prenatal genome in the research was 98 percent accurate compared to post-natal results in two separate pregnancies.

“This work opens up the possibility that we will be able to scan the whole genome of the fetus for more than 3,000 single-gene disorders through a single, non-invasive test,” Dr. Jay Shendure, associate professor of genome sciences at the University of Washington and the lead researcher in the study, told [ScienceDaily.com](#). Researchers said that such disorders as epilepsy, schizophrenia, and some cases of autism and intellectual impairments could all be potentially detected using the new test.

The [New York Times](#) reported that at present the process is not affordable enough to make it practical in a clinic or hospital setting. “The University of Washington researchers estimated that it would cost \$20,000 to \$50,000 to do one fetal genome today,” reported the *Times*. “But the cost of DNA sequencing is falling at a blistering pace, and accuracy is improving as well. The researchers estimated that the procedure could be widely available in three to five years. Others said it would take somewhat longer.”

The inevitability of the new prenatal test has pro-life leaders troubled, given how eager many doctors are to abort pre-born babies they suspect might be afflicted with some physical limitation. For example, noted [LifeSiteNews.com](#), “multiple studies have found that there is a higher than 90 percent abortion rate in the U.S. for babies prenatally diagnosed with Down Syndrome. According to the International [Down Syndrome Coalition for Life](#), about 50 percent of all Down Syndrome babies are believed to have lost their lives to abortion. The organization reports that there was an 11 percent decrease in babies born with Down Syndrome between 1989 and 2006, when there should have been an estimated 42 percent increase.”

Responding to reports of the new testing, Josephine Quintavalle of the UK-based [Pro-Life Alliance](#) told the London [Telegraph](#) newspaper, that “one always hopes, vainly, that in utero testing will be for the benefit of the unborn child,” But, she added while “this new test may not itself be invasive, given our past track record, it is difficult to imagine that this new test will not lead to more abortions.”



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In a subsequent press release the pro-life group noted that “genetic testing in utero almost inevitably leads to abortion of the unborn child. The easier and more comprehensive the test the more likely it is that such abortions will increase”

Researchers in the study conceded that the test could lead in such a direction. “The less tangible implication of incorporating this level of information into pre-natal decision-making raises many ethical questions that must be considered carefully within the scientific community and on a societal level,” they noted in their report. “As in other areas of clinical genetics, our capacity to generate data is outstripping our ability to interpret it in ways that are useful to physicians and patients.”

The *New York Times* quoted Marcy Darnovsky of the California-based Center for Genetics and Society as noting that the testing may well open the door to “some scenarios that are extremely troubling,” centered on such questions as “who deserves to be born.” The *Times* noted that the new testing could lead “to an increase in abortions because some parents might terminate the pregnancy if the fetus was found to have a genetic disease. But it is also possible that parents may be tempted to terminate if the fetus lacked a favorable trait like athletic prowess.”

Observed Dr. Stephen Brown, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Vermont: “You could start doing things more toward the direction of positive selection.”

Anthony Ozimic, director of the UK-based [Society for the Protection of Unborn Children](#), put the test in perspective in an e-mail to [LifeNews.com](#), noting that the “science-fiction scenario of the film *Gattaca*, in which babies are graded at birth according to predictions of future health, is becoming fact. Society can reverse this nightmare scenario by resolving to put human beings above so-called scientific progress.”

Photo: [Doctor with ultrasound equipment during ultrasound medical examination](#) via Shutterstock



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