Renal Pyelectasis

This means that the fetal kidneys are a little fuller with fluid than usual. Fluid circulates through the kidneys so it is normal to see some fluid here. Some fetuses simply show more fluid than others. This is most commonly seen as a normal variant among male fetuses, probably because they tend to be larger and also have more circulating fluid/urine. When seen in normal fetuses, it is considered ‘physiologic’. Increased fluid may also be seen occasionally in certain other conditions, namely:

a) Blockage, usually incomplete. However, this is highly unlikely when both kidneys are involved and the amount of fluid is only a little greater than usual.

b) ‘Reflux’ which means that urine in the bladder moves ‘uphill’ through the ureters into the kidneys. This usually is a transient condition related to immaturity of the urinary system, especially at the ‘valve’ where the ureters empty into the bladder.

c) There is a slightly- with emphasis on slight- higher risk for fetal Down syndrome, although it is unusual to see pyelectasis as the only finding. This is again a reminder to take a good look at the fetus and make sure there aren’t any additional markers, and to correlate with other risk factors/screening information.

Commonly we will ask for a follow up ultrasound later in pregnancy to determine if there is still extra fluid in the fetal kidneys. Usually this appears normal on the follow up exam. If there remains extra fluid on follow up, we might suggest evaluation after birth for possible reflux. If follow up after birth is suggested, this usually involves an ultrasound 4-8 weeks after birth. If there is still extra fluid in the kidneys, there is a special exam to test for reflux after birth. Severe reflux over a long period of time can damage the kidneys so there it is advisable to continue any follow up that is suggested, but also not to unnecessarily worry about it.

If you have further questions, we have 3 genetic counselors available to discuss your potential risks and to review other screening information.

Further information is available at www.fetalscreening.com and at www.fetalandwomens.com