What is a post-coital test?
A post-coital test looks at the quality and type of your cervical mucus around ovulation time (the middle of your menstrual cycle). It also looks for sperm in the mucus and whether they are moving or not.

The timing of your post-coital test is crucial as there is such a short time in which it can be successfully performed. This information has been written to explain about the test and the timing for having it performed.

What is cervical mucus?
Before you have the test, it may be useful for you to understand a little more about cervical mucus. It is a jelly-like substance produced in the cervical canal, which has a number of functions.

- It helps to prevent bacteria entering inside the body.
- It changes during the menstrual cycle so that sperm can go through it easily around ovulation time (when pregnancy is possible), but not at others. This is why the timing of the post-coital test is crucial.

Understanding the development of cervical mucus throughout your menstrual cycle
At the beginning of the menstrual cycle, there is not much cervical mucus.

Up until just before ovulation (as the amount of oestrogen produced by the developing ovarian follicle increases), the amount of mucus increases and becomes more watery.

Just before ovulation occurs, the mucus can be described as looking like “raw egg white” in consistency. Once ovulation has occurred, the mucus becomes thicker and stickier, and sperm can no longer get through.

What is involved in having a post-coital test?
The post-coital test involves you having intercourse and not having a bath afterwards. Then, within the next 3 - 10 hours you should come to the Fertility Unit to have the test.

In the Fertility Unit, a small amount of mucus will be removed from the cervical canal (in a similar way to having a smear). The procedure is painless and only takes about 5 - 10 minutes.

We then look through a microscope at the quality and type of mucus. We also look for sperm in the mucus and whether they are moving or not. The result will be given to you straight after the test is performed.
What do the results of the post-coital test mean?
A normal result means that the sperm are able to penetrate the cervical mucus, in order to enter the uterus.

A negative result is often due to performing the test at the wrong time - either too early or too late in the cycle. In such cases, a repeat test may be asked for.

A negative result may be due to an abnormality of the cervix for example, scarring from previous surgery, but this is rare.

A negative result also sometimes suggests that your mucus could be hostile to the sperm, or that there are antibodies present, which prevent sperm getting through.

The results of your test will be fully discussed with you. Please do not hesitate to raise any questions you may have.

How do I arrange a post-coital test?

To arrange a post-coital test, please telephone the Fertility Unit (telephone number as below) once your period has started.

If you have any queries, or require further information please telephone the Fertility Unit at Royal Derby Hospital on 01332 785643 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am - 2.30pm) and speak to one of the Fertility Sisters.