

Fetal Death

Intrauterine death may be the result of fetal growth restriction, fetal infection, cord accident or congenital anomalies. Where syphilis is prevalent, a large proportion of fetal deaths are due to this disease.

- If **x-ray is available**, confirm fetal death after 5 days. Signs include overlapping skull bones, hyper flexed spinal column, gas bubbles in heart and great vessels and oedema of the scalp.
 - Alternatively, if **ultrasound is available**, confirm fetal death. Signs include absent fetal heart activity, abnormal fetal head shape, reduced or absent amniotic fluid and doubled-up fetus.
 - [Explain the problem to the woman and her family](#). Discuss with them the options of expectant or active management.
 - If **expectant management is planned**:
 - Await spontaneous onset of labour during the next 4 weeks;
 - Reassure the woman that in 90% of cases the fetus is spontaneously expelled during the waiting period with no complications.
 - If **platelets are decreasing** or **4 weeks have passed without spontaneous labour**, consider active management.
 - If **active management is planned**, [assess the cervix](#):
 - If the cervix is favourable (soft, thin, partly dilated), [induce labour using oxytocin or prostaglandins](#);
 - If the cervix is unfavourable (firm, thick, closed), [ripen the cervix using prostaglandins or a Foley catheter](#);
- Note:** Do not rupture the membranes due to risk of infection.
- Deliver by caesarean section only as a last resort.
 - If **spontaneous labour does not occur within 4 weeks, platelets are decreasing** and the **cervix is unfavourable** (firm, thick, closed), ripen the cervix using misoprostol:
 - Place misoprostol 25 µcg in the upper vagina. Repeat after 6 hours if required;
 - If there is **no response after two doses of 25 µcg**, increase to 50 µcg every 6 hours;

Note: Do not use more than 50 µg at a time and do not exceed 4 doses.

Do not use oxytocin within 8 hours of using misoprostol. Monitor uterine contractions and fetal heart rate of all women undergoing induction of labour with prostaglandins.

- If there are **signs of infection** (fever, foul-smelling vaginal discharge), [give antibiotics as for metritis](#).
- If a **clotting test shows failure of a clot to form after 7 minutes or a soft clot that breaks down easily**, suspect [coagulopathy](#).