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Who's Your Baby Daddy? New Paternity Test Can Tell at 12 Weeks

By **BONNIE ROCHMAN** Tuesday, August 16, 2011

My youngest daughter has platinum curls; my husband and I have dark brown locks. When questioned, I routinely tell nosy people, “All I can say for sure is that I know I’m the mom.” It’s a joke: I’m certain that he’s the dad. But as of Tuesday, other would-be parents in need of proof can turn to a new blood test that can pinpoint paternity as early as 12 weeks into a pregnancy — much earlier than existing methods.

DDC, a privately held company that offers various genetic tests, has the exclusive U.S. license to market the clunkily named Non-Invasive Prenatal Paternity Test, which analyzes what’s known as circulating cell-free fetal DNA in the mother’s blood to suss out daddy’s identity. The test was created by Gene Security Network of Redwood City, Calif.

Each year, lots of pregnant women and their partners fret about fatherhood; DDC says it receives 400,000 calls annually, mostly from people inquiring about paternity tests. Until now, only amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling could determine paternity in utero, and both carry a slight risk of miscarriage. Barring those options, couples had to wait until a baby was born, when the infant’s cheek could be swabbed and compared with DNA samples from the mother and alleged father.

“Not knowing precisely who the father is is a major issue,” says Peter Vitulli, CEO of DDC. “We believe the waiting really increases the stress level for everyone involved.”

The new test, which costs \$1,625, is able to separate fetal DNA from that of the mother and father — and any lingering genetic material from previous babies the mother carried, which can stick around up to 20 years.

It’s available only through DDC, which has set up a toll-free number, 1-800-CALL-DDC, in anticipation of a lot of wealthy prospective parents. Considering that a pregnancy test costs about \$10, the paternity test is in a prenatal economic league of its own.

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