

## The Future of Prenatal Genetic Testing: Bioethical Reflections

Vardit Ravitsky, PhD  
Assistant Professor, Bioethics Programs, Faculty of Medicine  
University of Montreal

**Date:** Wednesday 9 November 2011 12:00-13:00

**Location:** Kleiner Hörsaal. Zentrum für Lehre und Forschung

---

### Abstract

An up-and-coming technology will soon allow genetic testing of a fetus with a simple maternal blood test early in the first trimester of pregnancy by isolating cell-free fetal DNA in the mother's plasma. This new technology will eliminate the risk of miscarriage that is associated with current invasive methods of testing (CVS and amniocentesis). It therefore promises tremendous benefits and has the potential to revolutionize prenatal care. At the same time, it raises serious ethical concerns. Will parents use this technology for sex selection or even to select for desired non-medical traits such as eye color? What uses would be considered legitimate and appropriate? Will women's reproductive autonomy be threatened when this test becomes a routine part of prenatal care? Will they be appropriately informed and given an opportunity to consent or decline? Or will the test become integrated into routine prenatal care within a medical system that favors testing and creates pressure on women to be 'responsible mothers' before birth? The talk will explore the implications of this new technology for individuals' reproductive autonomy and for the way we socially construct pregnancy and parenthood.

---

**Contact:** Stuart McLennan: +41 61 260 11 33 or [s.mclennan@unibas.ch](mailto:s.mclennan@unibas.ch)

