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Pune startup working on test kit to detect dreaded medical condition in pregnant women

According to different surveys, pre-eclampsia affects 3–5 per cent of pregnancies and is responsible for 10-15 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide. Intignus Biotech's test, called PEscreen, will be rolled out in the first quarter of 2024.

Written by [Dipanita Nath](#) [Follow](#)

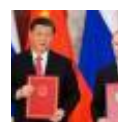
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Vaishnavi Kulkarni, CEO of Intignus Biotech.

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Pune startup Intignus Biotech is conducting clinical tests of a kit to detect the early onset of pre-eclampsia in pregnant women in collaboration with Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The National Health Portal of India estimates that “pre-eclampsia is a major cause of maternal and perinatal mortality (number of stillbirths and deaths of newborn in the first week of life) and morbidity”. According to different surveys, pre-eclampsia affects 3–5 per cent of pregnancies and is responsible for 10-15 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide.

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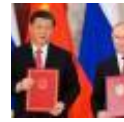
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Intignus focuses on healthcare solutions for mothers and children, and pre-eclampsia is their first target. The test, called PEscren, will be rolled out in the first quarter of 2024. “In most cases globally, women suffering from pre-eclampsia do not receive timely diagnosis. She is suspected of pre-eclampsia only when she

shows typical symptoms of hypertension or protein in the urine. She complains of dizziness, cannot breathe, and is hospitalised. Children born out of pre-eclampsia are often underweight. They are born prematurely and tend to develop neurological diseases later on,” says Vaishnavi Kulkarni, CEO of Intignus

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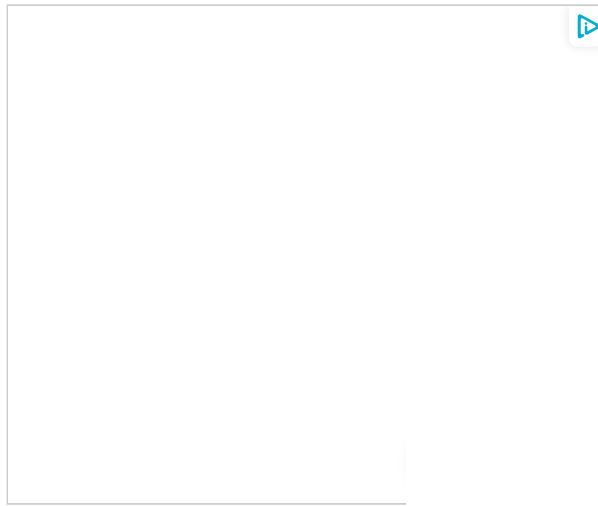
PEscreen involves a test that uses one or two drops of the mother's blood and can be performed during routine monitoring visits at the gynaecologist. A pregnant woman normally visits a gynaecologist four or five times and the test, which takes 15 minutes, will enable the doctor to determine the risk.

“This is a small, finger-sized portable test that is easy to administer and read. We have made this keeping the technicians, nurses and Asha workers in consideration,” says Kulkarni.

The test will cost less than Rs 1,000 and is targeting every pregnancy. “We have a market around \$5 million,” adds Kulkarni.

The test has been found to align with government schemes such as Janani Suraksha Yojana and Janani-Shishu Surakhsha Karyakram and the startup is working towards making it a part of the pregnancy care protocol in the future. Kulkarni, too, was diagnosed with pre-eclampsia in 2021 but was monitoring herself and could get timely help.

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“My daughter was delivered prematurely. My cousin has a congenital heart condition because my aunt was pre-eclamptic. She became eclamptic and went into a coma for a few days,” she says.

Intignus Biotech was founded in 2018 and has received grants worth Rs 3 crore from organisations such as the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council. Chennai-based Villgro recently onboarded them and is providing mentoring as well as help with funding, marketing and business development and technical assistance, among others.

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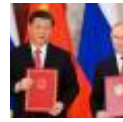
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“Just last year, the country witnessed 25 million pregnancies. Of these, 10 to 12 per cent of pregnant women have pre-eclampsia. This is a big problem. So, suppose there is a bio-marker we can measure in the body very early. In that case, this will help doctors predict the risk and deliver interventions/treatment accordingly to reduce the associated risks. As a result, a woman can avoid facing a complicated pregnancy,” says Dr Roshan Yedery, sector lead (healthcare), Villgro.



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