The NHS England open fetal surgery to treat fetuses with open spina bifida service has been in operation since November 2019 and has been operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period. The service has been assessing and operating on patients in both of the NHS England commissioned fetal surgery centres (FSC’s) as normal throughout this period. The service serves the populations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The two FSCs are located in UCLH, London and University Hospitals Leuven, in Leuven, Belgium and serve patients based on the location of the referring regional fetal medicine unit. The two units have a single co-ordinator and act as a single service on two sites with a joint surgical decision-making MDT.

During the COVID-19 pandemic period to date, there have been no restrictions on patients travelling to London or Belgium for this surgery and none are expected. Women and their partner/carer are supported and provided with all information to travel.

The service team are happy to accept referrals and offer support to all local and regional fetal medicine units. We ask that Consultant Obstetric colleagues make timely, early referral of women carrying a fetus with an antenatal diagnosis of suspected spina bifida to the national highly specialised service using the published pathway. This facilitates multidisciplinary assessment and counselling as well as ensuring optimal timing for surgery.

Please see NHS England service specification here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Vein-of-Galen-malformation-service-All-Ages.pdf>

Please see the service specification here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/publication/open-fetal-surgery-to-treat-fetuses-with-open-spina-bifida/>

Information about the joint service including how to refer a patient is located here <https://www.uclh.nhs.uk/OurServices/ServiceA-Z/WH/MAT2/YourPregnancy/Pages/Spinabifida-fetalsurgery.aspx>