A BLOOD TEST AIMS TO PREDICT PREMATURE BIRTHS

The test, which can be taken around the sixth month of pregnancy, could signal the likelihood of a premature birth

Spotted: Stephen Quake, a researcher at Stanford, has developed a blood test that may be able to predict if a baby will be born prematurely. Quake and his team studied RNA molecules in the blood of pregnant women at risk for premature birth and found seven genes whose changing activity appeared to signal a premature birth. Quake’s own daughter was born a month early, inspiring him to develop the test.

The test, which can be taken around the sixth month of pregnancy, may offer a cheap and fast way to predict the risk of premature births. Quake has launched a startup called Mirvie to commercialise the technology. To date, he has raised nearly €9 million from investors, including Khosla Ventures of Menlo Park, California.

Springwise has spotted other innovations aimed at making pregnancy safer, including an **AI tool** for predicting the likelihood of IVF success and a **taxi service** dedicated to taking pregnant women to the hospital.

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Email: info@mirvie.com
Website: mirvie.com
Contact: mirvie.com/#contact

Takeaway:
Around 10 percent of all births occur prematurely. Complications from preterm births are a leading cause of infant deaths worldwide. Quake’s findings still need to be validated through further testing and clinical trials, with some experts saying more evidence is needed that RNA can be a reliable indicator of fetal health. However, if successful, the tests could prove valuable in areas beyond premature birth. They could also be used to gauge the health of the placenta and of fetal development during pregnancy.