Test claims to predict gender
By Rick Ruggles
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

In an era of instant messaging and immediate gratification, a firm now offers an over-the-counter urine test to predict a baby's gender weeks before parents typically find out.

For about $32, a woman can learn 10 weeks into the pregnancy whether she'll have a boy or a girl — assuming the test works.

The company that makes the product, available at local Walgreens stores since March, said the test is 82 percent accurate and not intended to replace medical procedures.

Dr. Sonja Kinney questioned the product's accuracy and value, saying it preys on the eagerness of couples, relatives and co-workers to find out the gender as soon as possible.

"It's not something people here are recommending," said Kinney, a University of Nebraska Medical Center faculty member whose specialty is obstetrics and gynecology.

One Omahan, however, learned about the test from her doctor, who suggested she try it for fun before her ultrasound next week. She took the test. The result: boy.

Sixty to 70 percent or more of Kinney's expectant mothers want to know the gender, usually determined with an ultrasound.

For soon-to-be parents, there are important decisions to be made. Should they buy a white or mahogany crib? Paint the baby room sweet taffy pink or misty blue? And what about the name — Ava or Aiden?

The sooner they find out, the better.

Sara Koske of Omaha discovered through an ultrasound a month ago that she and her husband, Matt, would have their third girl.

They're debating between the names Juliet and Mary. Once they decide, they'll call her by name rather than "the baby." They also decided they could move her into a "girly" red room with a French countryside print, and that Mary or Juliet could use some of her sisters' clothing.

Koske, 30, has heard of the take-home test.

"If I had realized it was that cheap, I probably would have tried it," she said. "Just for fun."

Kinney recommends that rather than buying the gender test, women wait 18 to 22 weeks from conception for the ultrasound exam.

Performed by professionals, the imaging procedure can determine gender, but is used mainly for medical reasons to examine the anatomy and positioning of the baby, among other things.

It costs about $350 and typically is covered by insurance, Kinney said.

The new product, called the IntelliGender Gender Prediction Test, involves mixing the woman's first morning urine, and the hormones in it, with chemicals at the bottom of a small plastic bottle. After 10 minutes, the fluid indicates green for a boy, yellow or orange for a girl.

Kinney said it's not clear what chemicals are used or exactly how it works. She also said it's not clear how many women were involved in the product's testing.

Dr. Kristi NewMyer, an assistant professor of obstetrics at Creighton University's School of Medicine, said the test doesn't make sense and she wouldn't recommend it.

She's not aware of any clinical studies on whether hormones in a mother's urine could help determine a baby's gender.

Justine Sweeney, a spokeswoman for IntelliGender, declined to provide the number of women who tested it or describe how it works.
because its patent is still pending.

IntelliGender claims 90 percent accuracy in the lab and 82 percent accuracy in home use. The lower at-home accuracy is attributable to not carefully following directions.

Sweeney said that the Texas-based firm doesn't present the product as a test to replace medical exams and that people shouldn't base financial decisions on the findings.

"It's not a medical or clinical procedure or a diagnostic procedure," she said. "It's just fun."

While anti-abortion groups might worry about the test leading to gender selection, an IntelliGender company spokeswoman has said she couldn't imagine parents using it that way.

IntelliGender isn't the only over-the-counter gender detector. Another company, California-based Consumer Genetics, promotes online a $250 test that involves an at-home finger prick. The dried blood is placed on a card and sent to a lab, and a DNA test determines the gender.

Walgreens spokeswoman Vivika Vergara said IntelliGender is exceeding sales expectations but declined to be more specific.

An IntelliGender representative said by e-mail that the product first sold in late 2006 and that more than 50,000 have been purchased online. She said Walgreens, CVS/pharmacy and some other drugstores carry it nationwide.

World-Herald staff writer Michael O'Connor contributed to this report.