

CLAIMS:

1. A method for diagnosing preterm labour in a mammal, comprising detecting the level of an endocannabinoid in a subject mammal, and comparing the detected level with a reference level, an elevated level in the subject mammal being considered indicative of preterm labour.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the mammal is a human.
3. The method of claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the endocannabinoid is selected from the group comprising 2-arachidonoylglycerol, palmitoylethanolamide, and anandamide.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the endocannabinoid is anandamide (AEA).
5. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the reference level is based on typical non-term pregnancy levels for that species of mammal.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the reference level is based on mid-term levels.
7. The method of any preceding claim, further comprising the step of taking a sample from the subject mammal for detection.
8. The method of claim 7, wherein the sample is taken from plasma.
9. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the detection is performed *in vitro*.
10. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the detection is performed by means of antibodies to the endocannabinoid.
11. The method of any preceding claim, wherein the detection step comprises detection of the levels of fatty acid amide hydrolase (FAAH) in the subject mammal.

12. A method for diagnosing preterm labour in a mammal, comprising detecting the level of the enzyme fatty acid amide hydrolase (FAAH) in a subject mammal, and comparing the detected level with a reference level, a reduced level in the subject mammal being considered indicative of preterm labour.

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13. The method of any preceding claim wherein the detected level is detected during late pregnancy.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the detected level is detected at or near term.

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15. The method of any preceding claim, when carried out on a human, wherein the detected level is detected during the third trimester or later.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the detected level is detected at 35 weeks or later.

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17. The use of an endocannabinoid in a method for diagnosing preterm labour in a mammal, the method comprising detecting the level of the endocannabinoid in a subject mammal, and comparing the detected level with a reference level, an elevated level in the subject mammal being considered indicative of preterm labour.

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18. A kit for use in diagnosis of preterm labour of a mammal, the kit comprising a reagent for detection of levels of an endocannabinoid in a sample.

19. The kit of claim 18, further comprising instructions for use of the reagent.

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20. The kit of claim 18 or 19, wherein the reagent comprises antibodies against the endocannabinoid.

21. The kit of any of claims 18 to 20, further comprising means for taking a sample from a subject mammal.

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22. A method of treatment of preterm labour in a mammal, the method comprising reducing the levels of an endocannabinoid in a subject mammal experiencing preterm labour.

- 5 23. The use of an endocannabinoid in the preparation of a medicament for treatment of preterm labour in a mammal.

24. A method of inducing labour in a subject mammal, the method comprising elevating the effective levels of an endocannabinoid in a subject mammal.