

HIV and Pregnancy

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that often leads to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- HIV attacks the immune system (which protects our bodies from germs) by destroying white blood cells.
- It is very possible for a person to be infected with HIV for years without knowing unless they are tested.
- Many times HIV is not diagnosed until the immune system is so damaged that conditions such as the common cold become life threatening.
- AIDS is one of the leading causes of death for women between the ages of 25 and 44. This number has been steadily increasing.
- HIV cannot be transmitted by casual contact.
- It is transmitted when you come in contact with contaminated blood, blood products, and body fluids:
 - Having unprotected sexual contact.



HIV cannot be transmitted by casual contact.

- Sharing needles during IV drug use.
 - Accidental needle sticks in healthcare workers.
- Can be transmitted by donor blood and blood products. This is rare and protections are in place.
 - It can be given to an infant during pregnancy, delivery, and while breastfeeding.
- Getting HIV can be avoided or decreased if you do the following:
 - Use condoms.
 - Do not have multiple sexual partners.
 - Do not use risky sexual practices.
 - If you are using illegal IV drugs, get help to stop.
- 1st symptoms of HIV may include:
 - Low-grade fevers
 - Night sweats
 - Tiredness
 - No appetite
 - Weight loss
 - Swollen glands

- Infections that don't go away
- Diarrhea
- Muscle aches
- Joint pain
- Women may get more serious gynecological problems more often than non-HIV exposed women.
- The problems may include:
 - Vaginal yeast infections that don't go away.
 - Severe herpes simplex virus ulcerations.
 - Genital ulcerations.
 - Human papilloma virus (HPV).
 - Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

Early diagnosis of HIV is extremely important for pregnant women because:

- **HIV can be transmitted to the fetus during pregnancy and delivery.**
- **HIV can be transmitted to the newborn through breastfeeding.**
- An HIV blood test can be done.
 - Results are usually available within a few days.
- The risk of the mother giving the baby the virus depends on the amount of HIV in the mother's blood.
- If the mother has a lot of HIV in her body, a medicine can be given to her to help decrease the amount of virus.
 - The medication is azidothymidine (AZT).
 - If the mother takes this medicine, the chance of the baby getting HIV is decreased from 3 out of 12 (25%) to 1 out of 12 (8%).
 - Treatment usually includes AZT and other antiviral medicines.
 - Treatment is usually started in the 4th month of pregnancy and continues through labor.
 - The new baby is treated for about 6 weeks.
 - AZT does not appear to have any serious side effects.
 - If you are on AZT or other medications, tell your doctor. He will tell you what medicines to stay on or stop taking.

WHEN YOU ARE IN LABOR it is important that you arrive at the hospital early so you can take the AZT during labor.

- A cesarean section may be performed for some women to decrease the risk of HIV transmission during delivery.
- Breastfeeding is not recommended because HIV can be passed to the infant through breast milk.
- Babies that are delivered by HIV-positive women will test positive, but this does not mean that they have HIV.
 - To see if the baby has HIV, the baby's blood will be tested a few times.
 - Usually when the baby is 1 year old, the baby's doctor can tell if the baby has HIV or not.
 - Keep all of the baby's doctor appointments so the doctor can test the baby for HIV.

Get good care for yourself as soon as you find out you are pregnant.

- Get tested for HIV.
- Get proper treatment if you are diagnosed with HIV.

This will give you and your baby the best chance for having a safe pregnancy and a healthy baby.