

Cultural Daily

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A Brief Explainer on Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Pregnancy

Our Friends · Sunday, February 16th, 2020

Learn about health risks involving a sexually transmitted disease during pregnancy and possible treatments.

What's a sexually transmitted disease?

A sexually transmitted infection (also called an STI, sexually transmitted disease, or STD) is an infection you can get if you have unprotected sex or intimate physical contact with someone infected. You can get an STI if you have unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex. You can get an STI even if you're pregnant. Being pregnant doesn't protect you from infections.

Sexually transmitted infections may be caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. Many people with STIs don't know they are infected because they usually have no signs or symptoms. Every year, almost 20 million new cases of STIs arise in the United States.

Some STIs can be spread by means other than sexual intercourse. For example, it's possible to get some STIs, such as HIV, syphilis, and herpes, by direct contact. That can occur when touching the genitals, touching, or kissing an infected sore (in the case of syphilis), or sharing needles to inject drugs or other items that come into contact with the body fluids of an infected person.

Mothers can spread some STIs to their babies during pregnancy, childbirth, birth, and breastfeeding. STIs can cause serious problems for babies. Getting tested and treated early can help protect your baby from infection.

Should women undergo an analysis that detects a sexually transmitted infection during pregnancy?

A sexually transmitted infection during pregnancy can pose serious health risks to you and your baby. Therefore, the analysis for the detection of sexually transmitted infections, such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B, chlamydiosis, and syphilis, are usually performed on all pregnant women at their first prenatal consultation. It's recommended to perform the analysis for the detection of gonorrhea and hepatitis C at least once during pregnancy to women who have a high risk of contracting these infections.

Even if you had an analysis to detect a sexually transmitted infection in the past, you must do it again during pregnancy. Be sure to tell your doctor if you have symptoms, or if you participated in

high-risk sexual activities. It's possible to have a sexually transmitted infection without symptoms.

Some people feel insecure about going to get their test done. That's why SelfCollect created an anonymous, 100% accurate, and safe way to get your tests done at <https://selfcollect.com/>. They have tests for different STDs for both male and female. There's no better way to know if you have an STD than getting a test done. Start now.

How can a sexually transmitted infection during pregnancy affect your baby?

Sexually transmitted infections during pregnancy can cause many complications. For example:

- **HIV:** Pregnant women can transmit HIV to their babies during pregnancy, labor, vaginal delivery, or breastfeeding. However, if HIV is diagnosed before pregnancy, it's possible to take measures to reduce the risk of transmission.
- **Hepatitis B virus:** If a woman contracts the hepatitis B virus during pregnancy, the virus can also infect the fetus. The chances of this happening depend on when the mother was infected. If the mother gets the infection at an early stage of pregnancy, the chances of the virus affecting the fetus are 10%. However, if the infection occurs at a late stage of pregnancy, the risk increases to 90%. Hepatitis B can be serious in babies and can cause death. It can also cause liver scars, liver failure, and cancer, which could be fatal in up to 25% of cases. In addition, infected newborns have a very high risk of becoming carriers of the hepatitis B virus and can transmit the infection to others.

In some cases, if a woman is exposed to hepatitis B during pregnancy, she may be treated with a special antibody to decrease the likelihood of contracting the infection.

All healthy children should be **vaccinated against hepatitis B** to be protected from the virus for life. Babies born to women who had an ongoing hepatitis B infection (hepatitis B surface antigen) should also receive globulin hyperimmune for hepatitis B as soon as possible after delivery.

- **Chlamydia:** Chlamydia during pregnancy has been associated with premature births, premature rupture of membranes, and babies with low birth weight. Mothers can transmit chlamydia to their children during vaginal birth. If chlamydia is diagnosed during pregnancy, it can be treated effectively with antibiotics.
- **Syphilis:** Syphilis has been associated during pregnancy with premature delivery, intrauterine fetal death, and in some cases, death after childbirth. Babies who aren't treated have a high risk of complications that affect several organs.
- **Gonorrhea:** If left untreated, gonorrhea during pregnancy can cause premature delivery, premature rupture of the membranes, and low birth weight of babies. This infection can be transmitted to the baby during vaginal delivery.
- **Hepatitis C:** Some research indicates that hepatitis C during pregnancy increases the risk of having a preterm birth, a baby of small size for gestational age, and low birth weight. This type of liver infection can be transmitted to the baby during pregnancy.
- **Genital herpes:** Pregnant women who have contracted the genital herpes virus at a late stage of pregnancy have a 30% to 60% chance of infecting the baby. The risk of infection is particularly high during delivery. Herpes infections in newborns are serious and can cause death. Herpes

infections during pregnancy or at the time of delivery can cause brain damage, blindness, and injuries to other organs – [facts](#) on STDs and pregnancy.

Other effects of a sexually transmitted infection in the baby may be the following:

- Eye infection
- Pneumonia
- Blood infection
- Brain damage
- Sight loss
- Deafness
- Chronic liver disease

How are sexually transmitted infections treated during pregnancy?

Sexually transmitted infections can be treated and cured with antibiotics during pregnancy. Sexually transmitted infections caused by viruses, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV, have no cure.

In some cases, antiviral medications may be used to help reduce the risk of transmitting a viral infection to the baby. If you have HIV, your baby may need to be born by cesarean section.

What can you do to prevent a sexually transmitted infection?

There are several ways to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections.

- Refrain from having sex. This is obviously the most effective way to avoid sexually transmitted infections.
- Stay with a partner who isn't infected. Have sex only with a monogamous partner who isn't infected.
- Avoid vaginal and anal sex with new partners until both have been tested for sexually transmitted infections. Oral sex is less risky, but use a latex condom or a mouth guard (a thin, square piece of latex or silicone) to avoid direct contact between oral and genital mucous membranes.
- Use condoms and mouthguards always and correctly. Use a latex condom or a new mouthguard every time you have sex. Condoms made with natural membranes aren't recommended, as they aren't as effective in preventing sexually transmitted infections.

I'm pregnant. Can I get an STD?

Yes, you can. Pregnant women can be infected with the same sexually transmitted diseases as women who aren't pregnant. Pregnancy doesn't offer women or their babies any additional protection against STDs. Many are "silent," or have no symptoms, so you may not know if you're infected. If you're pregnant, STD testing, including HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), should be done as part of routine medical care during pregnancy. The consequences of an STD for you and your baby can be more serious, and even fatal, if you become infected during pregnancy.

It's crucial that you know the harmful effects of STDs, and that you know how to protect your baby against infections. If you're diagnosed with an STD during pregnancy, you should also have

screening tests and treat your sexual partner.

Having sex during pregnancy is good.

- Ensures the welfare of the baby. The mood and the bond between the couple guarantee the correct growth of the baby.
- Fights stress. Sex can be a good instrument to release tensions. This is because orgasms significantly increase adrenaline while lowering blood pressure.
- It's an ally of self-esteem. Throughout pregnancy, the female body undergoes a series of changes. Because of this, the image that women have of themselves is transformed, so many of them go from feeling attractive to unwanted.
- It brings emotional benefits. Having sex during pregnancy renews the relationship. It gives the mother the emotional support she needs to face this period.
- Increases sexual desire. This is explained by the high doses of progesterone, estrogen, and testosterone. Body changes favor larger breasts and more sensitive nipples, as well as new and striking curves.
- Increases pleasure. The vagina is more sensitive and lubricated. Intimate relationships are much more pleasant, and the quantity and quality of orgasms are amplified.
- Raises the defenses. Sexual intercourse helps keep defenses high. Reduces the risk of flu, colds, and the occasional stomach virus.
- Reduces the pains of pregnancy. Oxytocin is released in each orgasm, a hormone known for its ability to fight stress. It's also able to increase pain tolerance by more than 70%.
- Prevents preeclampsia. Preeclampsia is a common disease during pregnancy. It's associated with hypertension during this period. Male sperm contains antibodies that reduce the risk of suffering it.
- Accelerates postpartum recovery. Postpartum recovery is usually annoying. The mother is tired physically and mentally, and sometimes experiences a decrease in self-esteem. Fortunately, intimate encounters during pregnancy prepare the pelvic floor, which favors recovery.

Photo:  **Heather Mount**

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