



Indiana State Department of Health

Quick Facts

About...Pregnant Women and HIV

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). HIV damages the immune system, eventually destroying the body's ability to fight off infections and cancers. With new and improved drug treatments, HIV has become a chronic, not an acute, disease. Persons infected with HIV are able to live more normal and productive lives.

How is HIV spread from mother to child?

HIV can pass from the mother to the child during pregnancy, during delivery, or after birth during breastfeeding.

How can I tell if I have HIV?

The only way to tell if you have HIV is by taking an HIV test.

A law went into effect in July 2003 that requires a pregnant woman to be tested for HIV as a part of routine blood work, *unless* she refuses. If you are pregnant, take an HIV test. It is very important that you know if you do have HIV so you can take the proper steps to help prevent your baby from getting HIV. Encourage others to do the same.

What if I am pregnant and discover I am HIV positive?

Medications are available that may help prevent your giving HIV to your baby. Without these medications, there is a 25 percent chance of your baby getting HIV. With these medications, formula feeding, and possibly a Cesarean section, the chances drop to about 2 percent. Medications are not only provided to the mother, but the infant is given AZT for 6 weeks after birth. All of these measures greatly reduce the chance of an infant getting HIV from the mother. Most likely, the mother's medications will not be started until after morning sickness ceases.

Will I have to have a Cesarean section?

Not necessarily. If the amount of the virus in your body is low, a vaginal delivery may be considered. Ask your doctor for more information.

If I am already HIV positive and on medications, will my medications change during pregnancy?

Your doctor will monitor your level of HIV to help manage and possibly adjust your medications while you are pregnant. Your doctor will consider the risks and benefits of your medications and adjust them accordingly. Make certain you inform your OB doctor of your HIV status on the first visit, so the proper treatment can be started.

Will these medications hurt my baby?

Most of these medications have not been shown to cause problems to infants. Again, ask your doctor for more information about the benefits and risks of taking these medications.

Can I breastfeed my baby?

HIV is found in breast milk. Women with HIV in the United States are advised not to breastfeed when they have access to formula. Ask your doctor for more information.

What if my HIV test is negative?

Refrain from putting yourself at risk of contracting HIV in the future. If you feel you may have been at risk of getting HIV during the few months before the test, ask your doctor to repeat the test throughout the pregnancy.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: www.1test2lives.org

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