

PREGNANCY AND THE HIV TEST

There is a lot to think about when you want to have a baby or when a baby is on the way. One important step is to learn about HIV.

HIV is the virus that can lead to AIDS. It is spread through body fluids, such as blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk. HIV attacks the immune system, which is the system in the body that fights disease. Over time, HIV can make the immune system so weak that it cannot protect the body from disease.

There are good reasons to get an HIV test if you are pregnant or thinking about having a baby. Knowing whether you have HIV can help you decide how to protect your baby.

It is recommended that pregnant people be tested for HIV as part of their routine prenatal care, so talk with your healthcare provider or health department about getting an HIV test.

- See a healthcare provider as soon as you find out you are pregnant.
- If you find out you don't have HIV, you can take steps to make sure you don't get it. Knowing you don't have HIV can give you peace of mind while you are pregnant.
- If you find out you do have HIV, you can take medicine to lower the risk of passing the virus to the baby.
- Tell your healthcare provider about any medicines you take.

OVERVIEW

- If a pregnant person has HIV, it can pass to their baby in the womb, during birth, or after birth through breastfeeding.
 - HIV testing is recommended during pregnancy.
 - The risk of HIV passing to the baby can be reduced if the pregnant person takes anti-viral medication during pregnancy.
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- New medicines can slow the damage that HIV does to the immune system. If you have HIV, these drugs can help you live a longer, healthier life. You can care for your baby and other children.

How can a baby get HIV?

If a pregnant person has HIV, it can pass to the baby in the womb, during birth, or after birth through breastfeeding. Also, if a pregnant person gets HIV while they are pregnant, they can pass the virus to the baby.

Most cases of babies getting HIV are through labor and delivery. There is less of a chance for the baby to get HIV if you have a cesarean delivery (C-section) so talk to your healthcare provider about delivery options.

If a pregnant person has HIV, can the baby get it?

Sometimes. The virus can be passed to babies during pregnancy, labor, or while breastfeeding. But the chance is much lower if the pregnant person takes anti-HIV medicine during pregnancy.

When antiviral medication is taken before and during birth, and babies are given medication after birth, HIV transmission is reduced to equal to or less than 1%

If a pregnant person has HIV, their baby will test positive for having HIV antibodies because the antibodies are given from the parent to the baby while the baby is still in the womb. This does not mean that the baby has HIV and the antibodies should clear between 6 and 18 months of age.

A large percentage of infected infants become infected late in pregnancy or during delivery, so getting tested and starting treatment early in pregnancy can reduce the risk of a HIV-infected pregnant person transmitting the disease to their unborn child and slow down the progression of their own HIV disease.

What if I have been tested before?

Even if you have had an HIV test before, you may need to be tested again. If you don't know for sure whether your partner has HIV, talk with your healthcare provider about getting another test. You may want to ask your partner to be tested as well.

How can I protect myself and my baby from HIV?

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be very dangerous for babies. If you are having a baby or thinking about having one:

- Talk with your partner about ways to protect the baby's health. You may want to ask your partner to get tested for HIV and STIs.

- **If your partner has not been tested for HIV and STIs**, talk about using condoms for vaginal, anal and oral sex. Even if you had sex without condoms in the past, it may be wise to use them now.
- **Early treatment can help protect you and your baby.** In addition to HIV, pregnant women are often tested for other STIs like chlamydia, syphilis and hepatitis B. Talk with your healthcare provider to see what tests are recommended for you.

Remember that testing is for the benefit of your child. Pregnant people should feel comfortable talking with their doctors about their status and should create a treatment, delivery, and breastfeeding plan that both the healthcare provider and the parent feel comfortable with.

Learn More

Learn more about HIV from the American Sexual Health Association, a trusted nonprofit organization that has advocated on behalf of those at risk for STIs for more than a century. Our websites include:

www.ashasexualhealth.org
www.iwannaknow.org
www.quierosaber.org
www.nccc-online.org
www.askexpertsnow.com
www.YESmeansTEST.org

