

Attention Pregnant Women:

What You Can Do To Keep Germs From Harming You and Your Baby



Germs are everywhere in the world: on us, in us, and around us. Some of them can harm your baby before and after birth. This booklet has important information about some diseases caused by germs and the screening tests and vaccinations that can help prevent them.

Avoiding Harmful Germs

If a woman is infected with certain germs during pregnancy, she can pass them to her unborn baby. Infection from germs before or during birth may cause birth defects, illness, or death of the infant. These germs can be passed in foods, by pets, or by people.

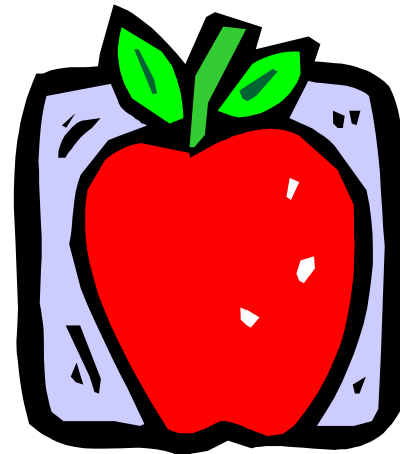
Germs in Foods

Listeria is found in foods such as soft cheeses and unpasteurized milk products. It is also found in undercooked poultry (like chicken), hot dogs, and sandwich meats. It can cause life-threatening blood infections and meningitis in newborns.

Toxoplasma is found in undercooked meat and unwashed fruits and vegetables. It can cause blindness, mental retardation, and hearing loss in babies. Some children can develop brain or eye problems years after birth.

During pregnancy, protect your baby from **listeria** and **toxoplasma** infections:

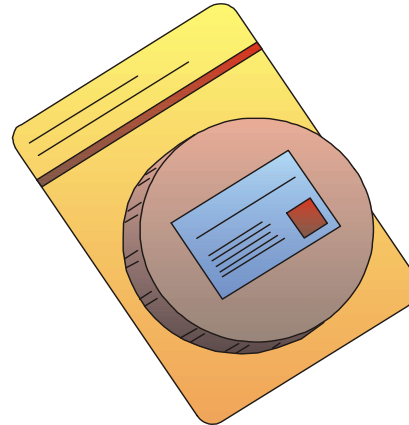
- T **DO** cook meat fully (until it is well done) before eating.
- T **DO** peel or wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with water before eating.
- T **DO** wash your hands, kitchen tools, counters, and sink with soap and water after they have touched raw meat, sandwich meats, fruits, or vegetables.



T **DON'T** eat hot dogs and sandwich meats (like bologna and turkey).

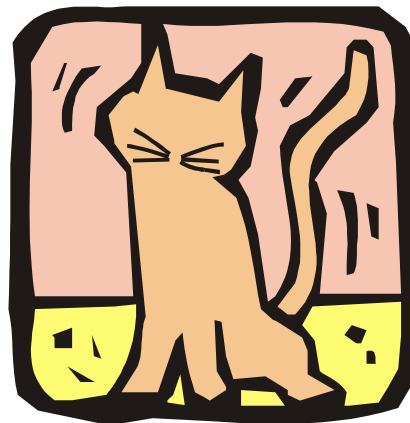
T **DON'T** eat soft Mexican-style cheese (like queso blanco or queso fresco) or feta, Brie, Camembert, and blue-veined cheeses (like Roquefort).

T **DON'T** eat or drink raw (unpasteurized) milk and foods made out of raw milk, such as soft cheese.



Germs From Pets

You can also catch the toxoplasma germ from contact with dirty cat litter boxes and outdoor places where cats go to the bathroom. Cats get this germ by eating small animals or raw meat that is infected. The germ does not make the cat sick, so you may not know if your cat has the germ.



If you care for a cat while you're pregnant, take these steps to protect your baby from **toxoplasma** infections:

T **DO** wear gloves when gardening and wash hands after any contact with soil or sand, because cat waste may be in the soil or sand.

T **DO** keep cats indoors if you can.

T **DO** feed cats only canned or boxed cat food, never undercooked or raw meat that could contain the germ.

T **DO** wear gloves when gardening and after any contact with soil or sand, because cat waste may be in the soil or sand.

T **DO** wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after gardening.

T **DON'T** change cat litter if someone else can do it.

T **DON'T** bring a new cat into your house that might have been an outdoor cat or might have been fed raw meat.

Germs From Children

Children can carry germs that don't always make them sick or may only cause mild symptoms. But if you catch these germs while you are pregnant, your unborn baby can get very sick.

If you work with children (such as in a day care or school) or have young children in your household, you should protect your unborn baby from germs spread by children.

German measles (rubella) and **chickenpox** (varicella) are common childhood illnesses and are usually not serious. But if you have never had these illnesses or been vaccinated against them, they can cause miscarriages or eye problems, hearing loss, and mental retardation in your baby.



Parvovirus (also known as "fifth disease" or "slapped-cheeks disease") is a mild illness in children that causes a fever and a rash on the cheeks. The germ can be spread through coughing or sneezing on another person. If a woman becomes infected during pregnancy, parvovirus can cause miscarriages and stillbirths.

Many children catch a virus called CMV (for **cytomegalovirus**) that causes them to have a fever or be tired, or it may not cause any symptoms. The virus can be spread by contact with body fluids like spit or urine. If a woman catches this virus during pregnancy, her baby could have learning problems years after birth. You should assume that all young children could have this virus even if they don't look sick.

During your pregnancy, take these steps to protect your baby from **rubella**, **varicella**, **parvovirus**, and **cytomegalovirus** infections:

T **DO** tell your doctor or nurse right away if you have been around a child with rubella, varicella, or parvovirus.

T **DO** wash your hands thoroughly after taking care of a child, especially after changing diapers, to avoid getting CMV from the child's urine.





Infections Spread During Sex

Many diseases can be spread through vaginal, anal, and oral sex. If you have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) while you are pregnant, it can make you and your baby very sick and possibly even die.

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Even if you have never had an STD, your health care provider may test for gonorrhea and chlamydia during pregnancy because these infections can harm an unborn baby even if the mother has no symptoms.

To prevent STDs and have a healthy baby:

- T **DO** tell your health care provider if you have an STD now or had one in the past.
- T **DO** tell your health care provider right away if you have symptoms such as genital sores, unusual vaginal discharge, or burning in your genital area.

Testing for Germs that Can Harm Your Baby

When you visit your health care provider during your pregnancy he or she may perform tests to find out if you have germs that can harm your baby.

Some of the tests involve taking blood, and some involve wiping inside the genitals with a swab. These tests will let your health care provider know if you or your baby need special medicines.

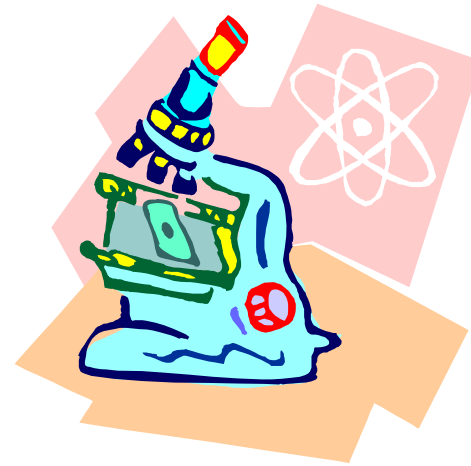
Group B Streptococcus (GBS)

What is it?

GBS is a normal germ found in the intestines and on the genitals of about one out of five pregnant women. GBS is usually not harmful to the woman carrying the germ. But it can cause dangerous infections in the blood, spinal fluid, and lungs of babies born to these women.

About the test

A test for GBS is done by swabbing the vagina and rectum. This test is done between your 35th and 37th week of pregnancy. If you carry GBS your health care provider may give you antibiotics (like penicillin) through the vein during labor and delivery to prevent passing the germ to your baby. If your provider uses the risk factor approach instead of screening, you may get antibiotics in labor if any of these problems happen while you are in labor: fever, preterm labor, or more than 18 hours goes by after your water breaks before you deliver



Hepatitis B Virus

What is it?

Hepatitis B is a serious infection of the liver. There is no cure for this disease. The virus that causes hepatitis B is found in blood and body fluids. The virus can go from mother to baby at birth or can be spread through unprotected sex and by sharing dirty needles.

About the test

A blood test can tell if you have the hepatitis B virus. This test can be done anytime during pregnancy. If you are infected with hepatitis B, your baby will receive medicine (called H-BIG) and a vaccine after it is born. These will protect the baby against the disease.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

What is it?

HIV is the virus that causes the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). You can get this virus by having sex with someone who has HIV, by sharing needles with someone who has HIV, or by receiving a blood transfusion (or other blood products) from someone with HIV. You can pass HIV to the baby before birth, at the time of birth, and even through breast feeding after birth.

About the test

A blood test for HIV can tell if you have the virus. Since many people do not know they are infected with the HIV virus, it is important to talk to your health care provider about whether you should have an HIV test. If you are infected, medicines are available that can help protect your baby from getting infected.

Vaccines for Mothers

A vaccine is a shot given to help the body fight certain diseases.

Vaccines for German measles, hepatitis B, and the flu are especially important for mothers so that you and your baby can stay healthy.

German measles

T If you have not had German measles (also called rubella) or the vaccine and you come into contact with someone with this disease during your pregnancy, tell your health care provider right away.

This vaccine cannot be used during pregnancy, so you should get the vaccine right after your baby is born. You will be protected before becoming pregnant again. After getting the vaccine, wait 3 months before getting pregnant again.



Hepatitis B

T Get the hepatitis B vaccine if you are not infected with the hepatitis B virus and you have any risk factors, such as more than one sex partner, IV drug use, or history of sexually transmitted diseases.

The hepatitis B vaccine can protect you and your baby from hepatitis B disease. This vaccine is safe during pregnancy and breast feeding.

Influenza (“the flu”)

T Get the flu vaccine if your baby will be born between March and July.

Pregnant women can get very sick with the flu and may need hospital care. The flu vaccine can help prevent you from getting sick with the flu. The vaccine is safe during pregnancy and breast feeding.

Chickenpox

T If you have not had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine and you come into contact with someone with this disease during your pregnancy, tell your health care provider right away.

You may need special medicine (called VZIG) if you are not protected against chickenpox. If you break out in a chickenpox rash shortly before or shortly after you deliver, your baby may also need the medicine. Chickenpox vaccine cannot be given to pregnant women.

Remember:

A healthy mother is important for a healthy baby. Protecting you and your baby from germs is just one step toward a healthy pregnancy. If you have any questions about infections during pregnancy or other pregnancy health issues, ask your health care provider.



For more information on topics mentioned
in this booklet, please see:

www.cdc.gov/groupbstrep

group b strep (GBS)

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases

listeria

toxoplasma

parvovirus (fifth disease)

varicella (chickenpox)

influenza (flu)

www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/dstdp.htm

STDs

www.cdc.gov/hiv

HIV/AIDS

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/index.htm

hepatitis B

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/nip

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March 2000

