

Fifth Disease

What you need to know:

Fifth disease (erythema infectiosum) is a common, mild, childhood illness caused by parvovirus B19. It causes a "slapped-cheek" rash on the face and, less commonly, fever, headache, sore throat and joint pain in children. Infected adults often have joint pain and swelling, and sometimes mild flu-like symptoms, but usually no rash.

Women with young children and those who work with them (for example, child care providers and teachers) are at greatest risk of exposure and infection.

About 60 percent of adults have had the infection as children and, therefore, are immune as adults. Most unborn babies are unaffected if their mother gets infected.

Some unborn babies, however, do become infected. The virus can disrupt the ability to produce red blood cells, leading to a dangerous form of anemia, heart failure and, in about 2-9 percent of fetal infections, death of the unborn child.

What you can do:

If you are pregnant and unsure of your immune status, you can help protect yourself from infection by:

- ❖ Washing your hands thoroughly and often, especially after touching tissues used by children who might be infected
- ❖ Not sharing drinking glasses and utensils with any one who has or was exposed to the illness

If you think you have been exposed to fifth disease, call your health care provider right away.

Chickenpox (varicella)

What you need to know:

Chickenpox (varicella) is a viral illness that mainly affects children. Its symptoms include an itchy rash and fever. Between 85 and 95 percent of pregnant women are immune to chickenpox, meaning that they cannot catch it. About 1 woman in 2,000 will develop chickenpox during pregnancy, however.

If a woman does catch chickenpox during pregnancy, there can be serious consequences to the baby, depending on when in pregnancy the infection occurs. If infection occurs in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy, there is a very small risk (less than 1 percent) that the baby will be born with congenital varicella syndrome, a group of serious birth defects.

If infection occurs around the time of delivery, the baby may be born with chickenpox infection. If this infection is treated, most babies have only a mild illness. Without treatment, some infants die.

What you can do:

There is a blood test that can determine whether you are immune to chickenpox. If you are not sure if you have had the disease, you can get this blood test before pregnancy or early in pregnancy. Women who are not immune, and not yet pregnant, can get vaccinated. Experts recommend that a newly vaccinated woman wait at least one month before trying to get pregnant.

Pregnant women who are not immune should avoid anyone with chickenpox and anyone who has had contact with someone with the disease. An infected person is contagious (can give the virus to someone else) before he or she develops the disease.

If a pregnant woman has been in close contact with an infected person, she can receive a special injection, which can prevent chickenpox or lessen its severity. This treatment is safe for mother and baby.

Contact your health care provider right away if you are pregnant and have been exposed to chickenpox.

GBSI is a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization that relies on your donations to fulfill its mission.

For more information or to donate, contact **Group B Strep International**
www.groupbstrepinternational.org
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February is

International
Prenatal Infection
Prevention Month

*What You Need
To Know About*

**PRENATAL
INFECTIONS**

This pamphlet will tell you about some common types of Prenatal Infections and offer recommendations to avoid or reduce risk of infection.

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Complications during pregnancy can be frightening and confusing. To help you understand the conditions and the medical jargon, we've gathered together the facts about some of the most common problems, what you need to know about them, and what you can do.

Toxoplasmosis

What you need to know:

Toxoplasmosis is a common infection. When a pregnant woman gets the infection, it can pose serious risks to her unborn baby. Between 400 and 4,000 babies in the United States are born with toxoplasmosis each year.

Babies born with toxoplasmosis often develop eye infections, an enlarged liver and spleen, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), and pneumonia. Sadly, some die within a few days of birth. Some are severely mentally retarded, have severe vision loss, cerebral palsy, seizures and other problems.

What you can do:

There are simple steps you can take to avoid toxoplasmosis infection:

- ❖ Don't eat raw or undercooked meat, especially lamb or pork.
- ❖ Wash your hands immediately with soap and water after handling raw meat.
- ❖ Clean cutting boards, work surfaces and utensils with hot, soapy water after contact with raw meat or unwashed fruit or vegetables.
- ❖ Peel or thoroughly wash all raw fruits and vegetables before eating.
- ❖ Don't empty or clean the cat's litter box. Let someone else do this.
- ❖ Don't feed the cat raw or undercooked meat.
- ❖ Keep the cat indoors.
- ❖ Wear gloves while gardening.
- ❖ Avoid children's sandboxes. Cats may use them as litter boxes.

Salmonellosis

What you need to know:

Salmonellosis is a food-borne infection caused by the bacteria *Salmonella*. Symptoms include diarrhea, nausea, fever and abdominal cramps that last for several days. Occasionally a pregnant woman passes the infection to her baby. After birth, the infant may develop diarrhea, fever and, less often, meningitis. Meningitis is an infection of the membranes surrounding the brain.

Foods that can become contaminated with *Salmonella* include raw vegetable sprouts and undercooked meats, poultry and eggs.

What you can do:

You can help prevent *Salmonella* infection by:

- ❖ Cooking all meats and poultry thoroughly
- ❖ Avoiding fresh unpasteurized juices made from fruits and vegetables
- ❖ Avoiding undercooked eggs
- ❖ Avoiding raw vegetable sprouts, such as alfalfa, clover, radish and mung bean

Listeriosis

What you need to know:

Listeriosis is a form of food poisoning caused by bacteria. If a pregnant woman has listeriosis, she may have a miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth, or her baby may become very ill or even die.

Foods that may be contaminated with the bacteria include unpasteurized milk, foods made from unpasteurized milk, poultry, and ready-to-eat meats (such as cold cuts or deli meats). Listeriosis may start with a flu-like illness with fever, muscle aches, chills and, sometimes, nausea and diarrhea. It can progress to meningitis (an infection of the membranes surrounding the brain) and blood infection. This can be a life-threatening disease. A blood test can determine if a person has listeriosis.

What you can do:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that all pregnant women take these steps to protect themselves and their babies from listeriosis:

- ❖ Do not eat hot dogs or luncheon meats (including deli meats such as ham, turkey, salami, bologna). If you do eat these foods, reheat them until they are steaming hot.
- ❖ Avoid soft cheeses, such as feta, brie, Camembert, Roquefort, blue-veined, queso blanco, queso fresco or Panela, unless the label says the cheese is made with pasteurized milk. Hard cheeses, processed cheeses, cream and cottage cheeses are safe.

- ❖ Do not eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads. Canned and shelf-stable versions are safe.
- ❖ Avoid refrigerated smoked seafood unless it has been cooked (as in a casserole). Canned and shelf-stable versions can be eaten safely.
- ❖ Do not consume unpasteurized milk or foods made from it

Group B Strep

What you need to know:

Group B streptococcus (GBS) infection is a common bacterial infection that is generally not serious in adults but can be life-threatening to newborns. GBS affects about 1 in every 2,000 babies born in the United States. Anyone can carry GBS, and between 10 and 30 percent of pregnant women carry it.

If a pregnant woman carries the GBS bacterium in her vagina or rectum at the time of labor, there is a 1 in 100 (1 percent) chance that her baby will become infected. Babies infected with GBS can get pneumonia, sepsis (blood infection) or meningitis (infection of the membranes surrounding the brain). Infected babies can be treated with antibiotics. Most have no long-lasting damage, but about 5 percent die, and some babies who develop meningitis suffer lasting neurologic damage.

What you can do:

You can be screened for GBS infection during the last few weeks of pregnancy. If you carry GBS, or your provider determines you are at risk for GBS infection, you will be treated with intravenous antibiotics during labor and delivery.

If you have any questions about GBS, ask your health care provider near the end of your pregnancy.

For more info as to how to help protect your baby from GBS disease as early as the first trimester of pregnancy through six months of age, please visit Group B Strep International's website at www.groupbstrepinternational.org.