

Pregnant? Worried about HIV and AIDS?

The good news is that there is now treatment to reduce the risk of HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) passing to a baby from a pregnant women infected with the virus.

A woman with HIV can be given medicine during pregnancy, and during her baby's birth, that greatly reduces the risk of the baby becoming infected. Treatment is also given to the baby for the first six weeks after birth. It is possible to pass HIV on through breastfeeding, so it is not recommended for mothers with the virus.

A pregnant woman who thinks she may be at risk of exposure to HIV should talk to her maternity carer - her doctor, midwife or specialist - as soon as possible. They will explain the blood test that checks for HIV, arrange for counselling and testing, and make sure mother and baby are offered the best advice and treatment if needed.

WHO IS AT RISK FROM HIV?

In New Zealand the number of women infected with HIV is still small, but growing. Most of these women caught HIV through having unsafe sex (sex without a condom) with infected men, or through sharing drug injecting equipment. Many of the infected men who passed HIV to women were infected from:

- having unsafe sex (with men or women)
- sharing drug injecting gear (especially needles and syringes)
- having unsafe sex with men or women in parts of the world where HIV/AIDS is common.

HOW DOES HIV PASS FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER?

The main ways HIV is passed on are through:

- having sex with a man or women infected with the virus
- sharing drug injecting gear such as needles or syringes
- an infected mother passing the virus to her baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.

HIV is **NOT** spread through hugging, kissing, coughing, sneezing, or from sharing drinking cups, cutlery, telephones or toilet seats, or other day-to-day contact.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'RE INFECTED WITH HIV?

The only way to know is to have a blood test. In some countries pregnant women are offered an HIV test at the same time as other tests they may have during pregnancy - rubella, hepatitis, sexually transmissible infections, ultrasound, etc.

You should not be given a test without your permission. Discuss the test in confidence with your maternity carer. This will enable you to make an informed decision before you give your consent to have a test. The test is confidential and, whatever the test result may be, it should be given to you in person, not by letter or telephone, and discussed with you.

WHAT IF THE BLOOD TEST IS POSITIVE?

A pregnant woman with HIV will be offered medicine during pregnancy to help reduce the chance of her baby catching the virus baby will also be treated for six weeks after the birth. Your doctor can tell you more about this treatment.

Counselling and support is offered to people infected with HIV. They are advised about living with the infection, how to prevent the virus passing on to others, and about treatment options. Advice is also given about safe alternatives to breastfeeding.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HIV AND PREGNANCY

The best way is to talk to your doctor, midwife or specialist as soon as possible. Information is also available at sexual health clinics, family planning centres or from the New Zealand AIDS Foundation. There may be a local branch in your phone book.

General information about HIV and AIDS, and access to counselling, is available on the AIDS Hotline - 0800 802 437; for Auckland callers 359 0099.

".... The good news istreatment is available to reduce the risk of your baby getting HIV".



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