

# Help Protect Your Baby from Infection during Pregnancy



February is International Prenatal Infection Prevention Month

Be your baby's advocate! Many types of infections can be prevented with healthy pregnancy habits remembered by using the mnemonic "HYGIENE"!

## H - Handwashing helps\*

Handwashing is an easy way to reduce the risk for your baby!

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds including after:

- changing any diaper
- feeding a young child
- wiping a young child's nose or drool
- gardening or contact with soil or sand

Remember to wash under your nails!

\*Handwashing can help prevent infections such as influenza, cytomegalovirus (CMV), and toxoplasmosis.

## Y - Yes to prenatal care\*

Prenatal care is an excellent opportunity to team up with your provider to prevent infection in your baby!

Having your urine cultured for bacteria at your first prenatal visit is important so you can be treated if necessary.

See your provider right away if you have any vaginitis symptoms. Yeast infection medications are not effective against bacteria. Symptoms can be similar!

Your provider will test you for some germs that you may not know you carry. Keep a copy of all test results with you to have ready when you arrive at the hospital to give birth.

Besides brushing and flossing your teeth regularly, see your dentist for cleanings and checkups as part of your routine prenatal care! Make sure to tell your dentist you are pregnant. Bacteria from your mouth can travel through your

bloodstream to your baby.

\*Prenatal care can help detect germs such as GBS, hepatitis B, and chlamydia so they can be treated. Dental care can prevent bacterial infections such as periodontal disease and tooth decay.

## G - Good food: safe preparation\*

Getting your recommended daily nutrition from good foods prepared safely can help nourish your growing baby and prevent exposure to infection!

Avoid the following:

- raw or undercooked meat and poultry
- unpasteurized milk
- foods such as soft cheese if made with unpasteurized milk
- hot dogs and luncheon or deli meats unless reheated until steaming hot

Use special care in food handling:

- Peel or wash fruits and vegetables
- Separate uncooked meat from other foods
- Avoid getting fluid from hot dog packages on other surfaces
- Wash cutting boards and counters after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, or unwashed fruits and vegetables

\*Good food prepared safely can help protect your baby from infections such as listeria.

## I - Immunizations\*

Making sure your immunizations are up-to-date (ideally before becoming pregnant) is another easy way to help prevent infection in your baby!

Ask your provider if you are immune to German measles (also known as rubella) and chickenpox which can both cause stillbirth or serious birth defects. These vaccines can't be given during pregnancy so if you aren't immune, avoid contact with anyone infected with these viruses.

Make sure you get recommended flu shots! Having the flu increases the risk of your baby being born premature as well as other serious problems.

\*Immunizations can help prevent infections from many causes including influenza and German measles.

## E - Evade others' bodily fluids

Simply staying clear of germs found in saliva, urine, blood semen, and other bodily fluids can help keep your baby safe!

Keep away from anyone with infections that can be spread through coughing and sneezing.

One of the most common ways pregnant women are exposed to CMV is through the saliva and urine of young children so:

- don't share food, drinks, eating utensils, and toothbrushes used by young children
- don't put a child's pacifier in your mouth
- avoid contact with saliva when kissing a child
- clean toys and surfaces that come into contact with children's urine or saliva

Always use safe sex practices! New partners can introduce germs even through oral sex.

Be careful to not come into contact with used needles, blood, or open sores and don't share toothbrushes and razors.

\*Evading others' bodily fluids can help prevent exposure to germs such as HIV, CMV, GBS, E.coli, and hepatitis C, and fifth disease.

## N - No to unnecessary invasive procedures\*

Invasive procedures such as cervical exams and membrane stripping can push germs closer to your baby!

Avoid unnecessary, frequent, or forceful exams. (Vaginal ultrasounds are a less invasive option.)

Talk to your provider early in pregnancy about not stripping your membranes (a procedure often used to ineffectively induce labor). Not all providers ask before stripping membranes during a cervical exam! Even if you test negative for GBS, you may be carrying other germs that could harm your baby.

\*Saying "no" to unnecessary invasive procedures can help prevent infections with germs such as GBS and *E. coli*.

## E - Environmental precautions\*

Enjoy your environment while using good precautions!

Some good strategies are:

- have someone else change your cat's litter box
- don't handle stray cats
- wear gloves when gardening
- walk in the center of trails to avoid ticks
- use EPA-registered insect repellents

\*Environmental precaution can help prevent infections such as toxoplasmosis, Lyme disease, and West Nile virus.



For more information, please visit [www.groupbstrepinternational.org](http://www.groupbstrepinternational.org)

This document is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice.