

## 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 HIV and STIs.** Talk 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.
- **Don't shoot drugs or share works (needles).** If you do shoot drugs, wash your needle with bleach before each use. You can call the Treatment Referral Helpline (1-800-662-4357) of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for referrals to local treatment facilities and support groups.
- **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 women 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 mother feel comfortable with.

Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are effective at reducing the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Latex condoms can reduce—but not totally eliminate—the risk of HPV transmission.

**STI Resource Center**  
**Monday - Friday, 9 am to 6 pm ET**  
**919-361-8488**

[www.ashalsexualhealth.org](http://www.ashalsexualhealth.org)  
[www.iwannaknow.org](http://www.iwannaknow.org) (for teens)  
[www.quierosaber.org](http://www.quierosaber.org) (en español)  
[www.nccc-online.org](http://www.nccc-online.org)

The American Sexual Health Association (ASHA) promotes the sexual health of individuals, families and communities by advocating sound policies and practices and educating the public, professionals and policy makers, in order to foster healthy sexual behaviors and relationships and prevent adverse health outcomes.

If you are a healthcare provider and would like to see our full range of available materials, please visit our online catalog at [www.ashapublications.org](http://www.ashapublications.org) or call ASHA Customer Service at 1-800-783-9877 or email us at [customerservice@ashalsexualhealth.org](mailto:customerservice@ashalsexualhealth.org).



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## PREGNANCY AND THE HIV TEST



**asha**  
AMERICAN SEXUAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

## What is 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.

## I'm pregnant. Should I get an 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.



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 women 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.
- Do not use alcohol, drugs, or any medicines not prescribed by your doctor.
- Tell your healthcare provider about any medicines you take.
- 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 woman has HIV, it can pass to her baby in the womb, during birth, or after birth through breastfeeding. Also, if a woman gets HIV while she is pregnant, she can pass the virus to her baby.

## If a pregnant woman has HIV, does her baby always get it?

No. Most women with HIV do not pass the virus to their babies. Without treatment or breastfeeding about 25% (1 in 4) of pregnant women with HIV pass on HIV to their babies.

But the chance is much lower if the mother takes anti-HIV medicine while she is pregnant. If women take these antiviral medication before and during birth, and their babies are given medication after birth, HIV transmission is reduced from 25% to less than 2%.

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 mother transmitting the disease to her unborn child and slow down the progression of HIV disease in the mother.

## 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 provider or health department about getting another test.

You may want to ask your partner to be tested.

