Botox & Baby: What We Know about The Risks during Pregnancy & Breastfeeding

There are a variety of uses for botulinum toxin, marketed as Botox, that include both cosmetic procedures and treatment for some medical conditions. The experts at MotherToBaby get questions about the safety of being injected with Botox during pregnancy and breastfeeding. While more studies are still needed, we can answer some of your questions with helpful information as you decide whether or not you feel comfortable using it.

What is Botox?

Botox and Botox Cosmetic are used by healthcare providers. Both include botulinum toxin, though each are used differently depending on what issue is being addressed. You may also see it called OnabotulinumtoxinA or botulinum toxin type A. This toxin works by paralyzing muscles at the site where it is injected, causing the muscles to relax.

There is an illness called botulism, which you may have heard of, and it is caused by the bacteria that make the botulinum toxin. According to the CDC, botulism is a rare but serious illness and can cause people to have vision or breathing issues, paralyzes muscles causing them to feel weak, and can cause death in some cases. It is often caused by bacteria associated with improperly canned or preserved foods and symptoms are likely to present 18-36 hours after eating the contaminated food. You can read more about the different types of botulism here.

What is Botox used for?

When used for cosmetic reasons, the botulinum toxin is injected into specific areas, like the face or neck, in order to smooth out wrinkles or lines in the skin.

There are also individuals who get Botox to help with medical conditions. Examples include treating chronic migraines, urinary incontinence (or issues with the bladder), and spastic muscle movements in parts of the body. Some people also get Botox injections to help stop excessive sweating in certain areas of their body. There are several uses for Botox, and some are incredibly important for improving quality of life and function for people.

What is known about being exposed to Botox during pregnancy or breastfeeding?

The short answer is not a lot. There have been no well-controlled research studies in either pregnant or breastfeeding people. Botox is expected to be contained to the area of the body where it is administered to and not to circulate throughout a person's system. Because it is not known to enter your system, or bloodstream, it is unlikely it could cross the placenta to reach a developing baby or to enter breast milk. However, because we do not know for sure, many providers suggest avoiding using Botox during pregnancy and lactation. It is also thought to stay in your body from four to six months, so avoiding using it while planning a pregnancy if possible may also be advised.

There are some risks that come with Botox use. It is possible to get an infection in the area where you are injected, and the toxin could spread beyond where it is injected. This can cause people to experience issues breathing and/or swallowing issues and seeking immediate medical care if needed is important.

Speaking with your healthcare provider is always recommended by the experts at MotherToBaby. If you are routinely receiving some form of Botox therapy, it may be worth discussing this with your healthcare provider before you become pregnant. Weighing the pros and cons of your therapy can help you make the best choice for yourself and your baby. If you are receiving Botox for purely cosmetic reasons, putting a pause on your injections may be well worth the wait if you want to take the least risk possible.

To read more from the Centers for Disease about botulism visit: https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/index.html

FDA Botox Drug Label: https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2011/103000s5232lbl.pdf

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