Depot Medroxyprogesterone Acetate (Depo Provera®)

This sheet is about exposure to depot medroxyprogesterone acetate in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is depot medroxyprogesterone acetate?

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate is the injectable (given by shot) form of a lab-made hormone called medroxyprogesterone acetate. It has been used to prevent pregnancy (as birth control). Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate can also be used to treat some problems linked to a woman's period (menstrual disorders) and, at high doses, can be used to treat certain types of cancer. This fact sheet will cover the use of the depot medroxyprogesterone acetate shot for birth control. Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate is sold under the brand name Depo Provera®.

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate is not the same as oral birth control pills (pills taken by mouth), which contain other hormones.

I am taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate, but I would like to stop taking it before becoming pregnant. How long does the drug stay in my body?

The time it takes the body to metabolize (to process) medication is not the same for everyone. In healthy non-pregnant adults, it takes 120 to 200 days, on average, for most of the depot medroxyprogesterone acetate to be gone from the body.

I take depot medroxyprogesterone acetate. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate is a form of birth control and is expected to lower the chance of getting pregnant.

After stopping depot medroxyprogesterone acetate, fertility (ability to get pregnant) might be lower for some time. Most of the time, this side effect is temporary, and fertility will return to normal levels after stopping depot medroxyprogesterone.

Does taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Use of depot medroxyprogesterone acetate is not expected to increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like depo medroxyprogesterone acetate, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Most studies have not found a higher chance of birth defects with exposure to depot medroxyprogesterone acetate.

Does taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

It is not known if depot medroxyprogesterone acetate can increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). Two studies reported a link to low birth weight while another study did not. Studies have not been done to see if depot medroxyprogesterone acetate can increase the chance for preterm delivery or other pregnancy-related problems.

Does taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if depot medroxyprogesterone acetate can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate:

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate passes into breast milk in small amounts. Taking depot medroxyprogesterone acetate while breastfeeding is not expected to negatively affect a child's long-term growth and development.

According to one health organization, use of depot medroxyprogesterone while breastfeeding is usually not recommended less than 6 weeks after the baby's birth. But the benefit of using the medication and breastfeeding your baby may outweigh possible risks. Experts in the United States say that depo medroxyprogesterone is acceptable for use in breastfeeding any time after your baby's birth. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about using depot medroxyprogesterone acetate and what medication is best for you. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes depot medroxyprogesterone acetate, could it affect his fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if depot medroxyprogesterone acetate could affect male fertility (ability to make healthy sperm) or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that men have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

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