Dextromethorphan

This sheet is about exposure to dextromethorphan in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is dextromethorphan?

Dextromethorphan is an over-the-counter cold medication that is used to treat cough. Dextromethorphan comes in pill, liquid and cough drop forms. Some cold and cough liquid medications contain alcohol. If you need to take dextromethorphan during pregnancy, it is recommended to choose a product that does not contain alcohol.

Dextromethorphan can be sold as a single medication treatment and it is also available in multi-symptom cold, cough, and flu medications. During pregnancy and while breastfeeding, when possible, it is best to avoid combination medications that contain multiple ingredients. Instead, choose single medications that treat the symptoms you currently have.

Sometimes when people find out they are pregnant, they think about changing how they take their medication, or stopping their medication altogether. However, it is important to talk with your healthcare providers before making any changes to how you take this medication. Your healthcare providers can talk with you about the benefits of treating your condition and the risks of untreated illness during pregnancy.

I take dextromethorphan. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Studies have not been done to see if dextromethorphan could make it harder to get pregnant.

Does taking dextromethorphan increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. In one study there was no increase in miscarriage. This study looked at the pregnancies of 128 persons who took dextromethorphan in the first trimester.

Does taking dextromethorphan increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Most studies do not suggest that the use of dextromethorphan increases this chance of birth defects.

Does taking dextromethorphan in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy related problems?

Studies have not been done to see if dextromethorphan increases the chance for preterm delivery (birth before week 37). One study found no differences in infant birthweight or the chance of stillbirth. This study looked at the infants of 184 persons who took dextromethorphan anytime during pregnancy.

Does taking dextromethorphan in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if dextromethorphan can cause behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking dextromethorphan:

One study looked at 20 breastfeeding persons who took one dose of 30 mg of dextromethorphan. This study found that dextromethorphan gets into breastmilk in small amounts. Therefore, infant side effects would not be expected. In this study, one baby had a rash that went away without treatment. It is not known if the rash was related to the medication in breastmilk or not.

Because many cough syrups with dextromethorphan contain alcohol, it is important to review the label before taking. Alcohol-free cough syrups are preferred while breastfeeding.

Infants that are born preterm or are younger than one month of age have a stomach and intestines that are less mature than older babies. This might allow more medication to enter their blood stream. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a male takes dextromethorphan, could it affect fertility (ability to get partner pregnant) or increase the
**chance of birth defects?**

Studies have not been done to see if dextromethorphan could affect male fertility or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the 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.