Erythromycin

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

What is erythromycin?

Erythromycin is an antibiotic. It can be taken by mouth (orally) to treat infections, including skin, respiratory, and pelvic infections. It can also be used in topical forms (on the skin) for treatment of skin conditions and eye infections. Some brand names for erythromycin include Eryc®, Emgel®, Erygel®, and E-mycin®.

Sometimes when women 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.

Can taking erythromycin make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Studies have not been done to see if erythromycin can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does taking erythromycin increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy. Studies have not reported a higher rate of miscarriage with erythromycin use.

Does taking erythromycin 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 erythromycin, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy.

Most studies have not found an increased chance of birth defects with the use of erythromycin. There are a few studies that have suggested that using erythromycin in the first trimester might be associated with a small increased chance of heart defects and pyloric stenosis (a narrowing of the opening from the stomach to the small intestines). These results were not confirmed in other studies. Based on current studies, including a study that combined and analyzed data from all the smaller studies, it is considered unlikely that erythromycin significantly increases the chance of birth defects, such as heart defects or pyloric stenosis.

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

Most studies have not shown an increased chance of other pregnancy-related problems, such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37 of pregnancy) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2,500 grams] at birth) when erythromycin is used later in pregnancy. Depending on the condition being treated, use of erythromycin might improve pregnancy outcomes such as gestational age at delivery and birth weight.

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

It is not known if using erythromycin during pregnancy can affect a child's future behavior or learning. One study followed children up to 11 years of age who were exposed to erythromycin during pregnancy. The study found that these children were not more likely to need special educational support in school than children who were not exposed.

Breastfeeding while taking erythromycin:

Erythromycin passes into breast milk in small amounts. It has also been given directly to infants when needed. Short-term use of erythromycin is usually considered compatible with breastfeeding.

One study reported a possible increased chance of pyloric stenosis (a condition that can cause vomiting in infants) among infants whose mothers were prescribed erythromycin during delivery or within 90 days after delivery. Although

some of the mothers were breastfeeding, it was not known whether they took the medication. Other studies have not found an association between erythromycin use during breastfeeding and an increased chance of pyloric stenosis in infants.

As with any antibiotic, contact your baby's healthcare provider if you notice symptoms such as diarrhea, diaper rash, or thrush (a yeast infection in the mouth). Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes erythromycin, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

One study looked at whether past use of erythromycin affected sperm quality. The study suggested that erythromycin use might be linked to lower sperm count (number of sperm) and lower sperm movement (motility). However, the study did not look at the dose, timing, or reason the antibiotic was used. Because of this, the results may not show the true effect of erythromycin on the sperm. Studies have not been done to see if erythromycin could increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that men have are less likely 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.

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