Mpox (formerly known as Monkeypox)

This sheet is about having mpox in a pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on available published literature. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is mpox?

Mpox (which used to be called monkeypox) is an illness caused by the mpox virus (MPXV). MPXV belongs to a group of viruses called orthopoxviruses. Symptoms of mpox can begin 5 to 21 days after being exposed to the MPXV virus, but most people start having symptoms in 7 to 14 days.

The first symptoms to appear include:

- fever
- headache
- muscle aches
- backache
- swollen lymph nodes (“glands”)
- chills
- exhaustion (being very tired)

A few days after these symptoms start, a skin rash appears on the body. The rash usually starts near the genitals or on the face. The rash causes bumps and sores that can be itchy and painful, and that gradually turns into scabs that fall off.

In most people, the illness lasts 2 to 4 weeks before clearing up on its own. However, for some people, mpox can cause severe illness and even death. Women who are pregnant are more likely to have more severe illness.

How do you get mpox?

Mpox spreads from person to person through body fluids. This can include direct contact with the skin sores or scabs of an infected person, from the fluids that come from these sores (such as on clothing or bedding), or through saliva and respiratory droplets (such as kissing or being in close contact with someone with mpox when they breathe, talk, cough, or sneeze). Mpox can also spread through intimate or sexual contact with a person with mpox. A pregnant woman can pass the mpox virus to her fetus (called vertical transmission).

How can I protect my pregnancy from mpox?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend the following:

- Avoid close or intimate contact with people who have a rash that looks like mpox.
- Avoid animals that can carry the virus.
- Do not use objects or materials a person with mpox has used.
- Wash your hands well and often

A vaccine for mpox is available and recommended for some people. More information can be found on the CDC's website on mpox vaccination here: https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/mpox/vaccines/vaccine-recommendations.html.

What should I do if I think I have been infected with mpox?

It is important that you seek medical attention if you think you have mpox. Treatment for mpox will depend on your symptoms. The CDC has recommended that women who are pregnant, recently pregnant, or breastfeeding, and do need treatment for their mpox, that they receive an antiviral treatment. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about what mpox treatment is best for you.

I have mpox. Can it make it harder for me to become pregnant?

It is not known if having mpox can make it harder to get pregnant. There are no official recommendations to wait to get pregnant after having mpox. However, Mpox can be passed to a fetus during pregnancy. Talk with your healthcare provider about your plans to try and get pregnant.

Does having mpox increase the chance of miscarriage?

This has not been well-studied. Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Human case reports have suggested that infection with mpox during pregnancy can increase the chance of miscarriage.

Does having mpox 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. Mpox infection has not been well-studied in pregnancy. Based on case reports, mpox is not expected to increase the chance for birth defects.

Fever is a possible symptom of mpox. A high fever in the first trimester can increase the chance of certain birth defects. Acetaminophen is usually recommended to reduce fever in pregnancy. If you have a fever, talk with your healthcare provider about how to treat it during pregnancy. For more information about fever and pregnancy, see the MotherToBaby fact sheet about hyperthermia at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/ and a fact sheet on acetaminophen here: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/acetaminophen-pregnancy/.

Would having mpox increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Mpox infection during pregnancy might increase the chance for stillbirth and preterm delivery (birth before week 37). It is not known if mpox infection can cause other pregnancy-related problems, such as low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces (2500 grams) at birth).

Can the virus that causes mpox pass to the baby during pregnancy or at the time of delivery?

When a woman passes an infection to the fetus in a pregnancy, it is called vertical transmission. Vertical transmission has been reported with mpox infection in pregnancy. Some of these newborns had mpox symptoms, including skin lesions. There are also some case reports of mpox not passing to the fetus. It is not known how often a mpox infection might pass to a fetus during pregnancy or at the time of delivery, or how likely it is to cause problems during pregnancy or after birth.

Does having mpox in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to learn if having mpox in pregnancy can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while I have mpox:

The mpox virus has been detected in breast milk, but it is not known if mpox can be spread to a baby through breast milk. It is not known if having skin sores on or near the nipples or breasts could cause the virus to get into milk that is expressed or pumped. The virus can be passed to an uninfected infant through close contact with a person who is infected (such as holding the baby to breastfeed). If you have mpox, talk with your baby's healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby until you recover. If you suspect that your baby has any symptoms of mpox, contact the child's healthcare provider right away. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding

questions.

If a man has mpox, can it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if having mpox could affect male fertility (ability to make healthy sperm) or increase the chance of birth defects above the background risk. Mpox can spread through intimate or sexual contact with a person with mpox. Talk with your healthcare provider as soon as possible if you or your partner has mpox. For more general information on paternal exposures, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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