Salmonella

This sheet is about exposure to ***Salmonella*** in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on available research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is Salmonella?

Salmonella is a bacterium. There are many different types of ***Salmonella*** bacteria that can cause someone to get sick. People who have weakened immune systems, along with young children and older adults, are more likely to get sick from ***Salmonella***.

Symptoms of a ***Salmonella*** infection can include diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramping. These symptoms typically appear 12 to 72 hours after being infected. People who get a ***Salmonella*** infection could feel sick for 4 to 7 days. An infection might be serious enough to need treatment in a hospital. There is no vaccination that will prevent a ***Salmonella*** infection.

How do you get Salmonella?

Foods are the most common source of a ***Salmonella*** infection. To lower your chance of getting a ***Salmonella*** infection, it is important to fully cook eggs and meat before eating. Raw fruits and vegetables, as well as unpasteurized milk and dairy products, can also be a source of ***Salmonella***. Fruits and vegetables should be well-washed whether cooked or eaten raw. Avoid drinking unpasteurized milk (also called raw milk) or eating any foods made with unpasteurized milk. Products contaminated by ***Salmonella*** are listed on several websites including https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/index.html and https://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm.

Handling or coming into contact with animals such as amphibians, reptiles, and birds can also increase the chance of getting a ***Salmonella*** infection. These animals leave behind the bacteria that can potentially spread to humans who clean their aquariums or terrariums. Bacteria can be found on healthy animals and does not usually make the animals sick. Thoroughly wash your hands after handling these animals. Proper handling of animals and their living spaces will greatly lower your chance of getting infected with ***Salmonella***. Information on animals that carry ***Salmonella*** bacteria can be found here: https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/spread/index.html.

How can I find out if I have Salmonella?

If you think you have ***Salmonella***, talk to your healthcare providers. To test for ***Salmonella***, your healthcare provider takes a stool sample (a sample of your poop) and sends it to a lab for testing.

I have Salmonella. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

It is not known if a ***Salmonella*** infection can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having/getting Salmonella during pregnancy increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. There are case reports of ***Salmonella*** bacteria causing an infection of the amniotic fluid (the fluid that surrounds the fetus during pregnancy). While rare, this can lead to miscarriage.

Does having/getting Salmonella 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 a ***Salmonella*** infection, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy. Available data does not suggest an increased chance of birth defects due to ***Salmonella*** infection.

Would having/getting Salmonella increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Studies have not been done to see if ***Salmonella*** can cause 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).

In about 4% of cases (4 in 100), ***Salmonella*** can cause bacteremia, a condition where there are bacteria enters the bloodstream and can lead to serious illness or even death in the woman who is pregnant, as well as death of the fetus.

Does having/getting Salmonella in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

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

Can Salmonella pass to the baby during pregnancy or at the time of delivery?

When a woman is pregnant and passes an infection to the fetus, it is called vertical transmission. Vertical transmission has been reported with ***Salmonella*** infection in pregnancy. Vertical transmission can happen at any time in pregnancy but is more likely to happen when someone gets the infection close to delivery.

Babies born with ***Salmonella*** infection can have sepsis (a blood infection) or develop meningitis. Meningitis is a condition where there are areas of swelling around the brain and spinal cord in the baby. If not treated promptly, the effects of meningitis can lead to long-term problems for some children.

Breastfeeding with a Salmonella infection:

There is 1 report of ***Salmonella*** bacteria passing into breast milk. In most cases, breastfeeding does not need to stop if the woman who is breastfeeding has ***Salmonella***. If you have or are being treated for a ***Salmonella*** infection, talk to your healthcare provider and your child's pediatrician. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has a Salmonella infection, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if ***Salmonella*** could affect a man's fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) or increase the chance of birth defects. ***Salmonella*** infection can be passed from person to person. If infected, wash your hands thoroughly and often to lower the chance of passing a ***Salmonella*** infection to others. If your partner has a ***Salmonella*** infection, talk with your healthcare provider. For 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.

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