Salmonella

This sheet is about exposure to Salmonella in a pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information 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 may be serious enough to need treatment in a hospital. There is no vaccination that will prevent a Salmonella infection.

How do people get infected with Salmonella?

Foods are most often the 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 is another way Salmonella bacterium is spread to humans. These animals also leave behind the bacteria that can potentially infect humans who clean their aquariums or terrariums. The infectious 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 becoming infected with Salmonella. Information on animals that carry Salmonella bacteria can be found here: https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/diseases/salmonella.html

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 for miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Based on the studies reviewed, having a Salmonella infection may increase the chance for miscarriage. 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?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Based on the studies reviewed, it is not known if Salmonella increases the chance for birth defects above the background risk. The available data does not suggest an increased chance of birth defects due to Salmonella infection.

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

Based on the studied reviewed, Salmonella may increase the chance for 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 in the bloodstream that can lead to fetal loss.

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

Studies have not been done to see if Salmonella can cause behavior or learning issues for the child.
Though rare, Salmonella infection can be passed from the person who is pregnant to the fetus during pregnancy. 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 while I have a Salmonella infection:**

In most cases, breastfeeding does not need to stop if the person who is breastfeeding has Salmonella. There is a report suggesting that Salmonella may have been passed from a person who was breastfeeding to the nursing child. 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 of your breastfeeding questions.

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

Studies have not been done to see if Salmonella could affect male fertility or increase the chance of birth defects above the background risk. Salmonella infection can be passed from person to person. If infected, wash your hands thoroughly and often to help lower the chance of passing a Salmonella infection to others. If your partner has a Salmonella infection, talk with your healthcare provider. For more information on paternal exposures, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.