Salmonella and Pregnancy

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk. This sheet talks about whether exposure to salmonella may increase the risk for birth defects over that background risk. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is salmonella?
Salmonella is a type of bacteria that can cause sickness. Symptoms might include diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramping. The symptoms typically appear 12 to 72 hours after being infected. Healthy individuals who get salmonella could feel sick for 4 to 7 days. Sometimes sick individuals need treatment in a hospital. Young children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have problems. There are many types of salmonella bacteria. There is no vaccine to prevent salmonella infection.

How can I become infected with salmonella?
Foods are often the source of salmonella infection. People should not eat raw or undercooked eggs or meat. Raw or unpasteurized milk and dairy products can also be a source. Fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed. Another common source of salmonella is contact with certain animals, particularly reptiles and birds. Always wash your hands thoroughly after petting or handling reptiles and birds to lower the chance of becoming infected with salmonella.

Recalls of products contaminated by salmonella are listed on several websites including: http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/index.html and http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm.

How is a salmonella infection tested for and treated?
Salmonella is treated with antibiotics. A culture can predict which antibiotic would be best to use. Your health care provider will help order these tests and medicines.

Can a salmonella infection lead to a pregnancy loss?
Although rare, there are case reports of salmonella infections that caused infection of the amniotic fluid (the fluid around the baby in the womb), miscarriage, and pregnancy loss.

I had salmonella during my pregnancy. Can this cause a birth defect in my baby?
There is no evidence that salmonella infection during pregnancy can cause birth defects in the baby.

If I have salmonella can I continue to breastfeed my baby?
In general, breastfeeding allows maternal antibodies to pass to the child, which can protect a baby from illness. However, there are case reports which have suggested salmonella might have been passed from the nursing mother to her baby. For most, breastfeeding does not need to stop; however, be sure to practice good hand washing. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all your choices for breastfeeding.

What if the father has salmonella? Could that harm our pregnancy?
Although salmonella is most often contacted through contaminated foods or animals, it can be passed from person to person. Wash hands often to help reduce the chance of passing the disease among people living in the house.
In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at http://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/.

Selected References: