Salmonella

This sheet talks about exposure to Salmonella in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is Salmonella?

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

Symptoms of an 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 that treatment in a hospital is necessary. There is no vaccination that will prevent a Salmonella infection.

How can I become infected with Salmonella?

There are many ways to become infected with Salmonella; however, foods are most often the source of an infection. To avoid this type of infection, it is important that eggs and meat are fully cooked. Raw fruits and vegetables, as well as unpasteurized milk and dairy products, can also be a source of Salmonella. Fruits and vegetables should be always thoroughly washed whether cooked or eaten raw.

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 bacteria 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 doesn’t usually make the animals sick. It’s best to be cautious and thoroughly wash your hands after handling these animals. Proper handling of animals and their living spaces will significantly reduce your chance of becoming infected with Salmonella.

Information on animals that carry Salmonella bacteria can be found at the following source which is frequently updated: https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/diseases/salmonella.html

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 healthcare provider will help order these tests and medications.

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

There is no current data to suggest that Salmonella infection makes it harder to become pregnant.

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

Miscarriage can occur in any pregnancy. There are case reports of Salmonella bacteria causing an infection of the amniotic fluid (the fluid that surrounds the baby during pregnancy). These infections are rare, but they can be serious and lead to miscarriage. If you feel you have an infection you should contact your healthcare provider right away.

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. An increased chance of birth defects has not been typically observed as a result of Salmonella infection.

Would having/getting Salmonella cause pregnancy complications?

While not common, Salmonella can increase the chance of complications during pregnancy, depending on the severity of the infection. In some cases, it can increase the chance for preterm delivery (delivery before 37 weeks of pregnancy) and restrict the growth of the fetus. In about 4% of cases, Salmonella can cause bacteremia, a condition
where there are bacteria in the bloodstream that creates an unhealthy environment in the uterus and can lead to fetal loss.

**Does having/getting Salmonella in pregnancy cause long-term problems for the baby?**

Though rare, Salmonella infection can be passed from the person who is pregnant to the baby during pregnancy. A baby infected with Salmonella may have symptoms such as fever and diarrhea at birth. Babies born with Salmonella infection can also have sepsis (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 with antibiotics, the effects of meningitis can lead to long-term problems for some children.

**Can I breastfeed while sick with Salmonella infection?**

There is a report suggesting that Salmonella may have been passed from a person who was breastfeeding to the baby. In most cases, breastfeeding does not need to stop if the person who is breastfeeding has Salmonella. Talk to your healthcare provider and your child’s pediatrician about breastfeeding during Salmonella infection and treatment, as well as your other breastfeeding questions.

**I have a Salmonella infection. Can it make it harder for me to get my partner pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?**

Although Salmonella is most often contracted through contaminated foods or animals, it can be passed from person to person. If infected, wash your hands thoroughly and often to help reduce the possibility of passing a Salmonella infection to others.

In general, most exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/.

Please click here for references.