

HIV and Other Important Pregnancy Tests



What blood tests are recommended for all pregnant women?

As part of good prenatal care, doctors recommend certain routine blood tests to detect infections and other conditions in pregnancy. If a problem is found, treatment can reduce the risk of harm to pregnant women and their babies.

Routine blood testing for pregnant women should include but is not limited to the following. Your doctor may perform other blood tests during your pregnancy.

- **Complete blood count.** This test examines the number and size of red blood cells and white blood cells and can detect conditions like anemia, infection, or clotting problems.
- **Hepatitis B test.** Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver. If the mother has this infection, there is a chance that without treatment the baby will be infected. The baby can be treated at birth to prevent infection in almost all cases.
- **Rubella (German measles) test.** A German measles infection during pregnancy can lead to severe birth defects. If a woman is not immune, a vaccine can be given to her after the baby is born to prevent infection in future pregnancies.
- **Blood type (A, B, AB, O) and Rh factor (Rh negative or Rh positive) test.** A pregnant woman who is Rh negative may need to receive a blood product called anti-D immune globulin. This product prevents the development of antibodies in the mother's body that can break down the baby's red blood cells. This latter condition, called hemolytic disease, can lead to severe problems in the newborn if not treated.
- **Syphilis test.** Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease. If it is found in pregnancy, complications can be treated and congenital infection in the baby can be prevented or treated. A syphilis test often is required by public health agencies.
- **Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) test.** HIV is the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Many women who have HIV do not know they are infected because it is possible to have HIV for years and not know it or not feel sick. A pregnant woman needs to know if she has HIV in order to get early help for herself and to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection to her baby. Even without symptoms, a woman with HIV has a 1 in 4 chance of passing the infection to her baby. This risk can be greatly reduced with treatment.

What if I have HIV and I am pregnant?

You can pass HIV to your baby during pregnancy, at delivery, or during breastfeeding. Appropriate medical care during pregnancy and delivery, which includes taking special medications, can greatly improve your health as well as protect the health of your baby. Your doctor will recommend that you take special medications for HIV while you are pregnant and, in some cases, may recommend that you undergo a cesarean delivery. These medications allow approximately 99% of infected women to have uninfected babies. However, without treatment, 1 in 4 babies will become infected.

If I have HIV, what happens after my baby is born?

- Right after birth and for the next 6 weeks, your baby will be given special medication to further reduce his or her chance of becoming infected with HIV. Also, your baby will be tested for HIV.
- Your baby could get HIV from breast milk. Women who are HIV positive should not breastfeed.

What if I decide not to have the HIV test?

- You will be given the same prenatal care as other women. However, if you have HIV and do not know it, your doctor will not know to give you special medications for HIV to protect you and your baby.
- You probably will be asked to have a rapid HIV test when you are in labor if you are not tested now.
- Some states require testing of your baby if you are not tested before he or she is born.

If I have the HIV test, who will know the results?

If you have HIV, your baby's doctor also may be notified so that the baby's treatment can begin immediately after birth. States have different requirements about reporting new HIV cases. If you are concerned about this, ask your doctor about your state's policy and where you can get more information.

When do I get tested for HIV?

You should be tested for HIV at the same time you are given other pregnancy blood tests, which usually are obtained at your first prenatal visit.

What happens when I am tested for HIV?

A small amount of blood is taken from your arm (at the same time blood is taken for the other routine tests in pregnancy). Your doctor will have the final test result in approximately 2 weeks. Sometimes your doctor may use a rapid HIV test. If the rapid test result is negative, you will know the same day and will not have to have further testing. If the rapid test result is positive, your doctor will talk to you about the meaning of this preliminary result, the need for additional testing, and possible treatment options. If any final test results are positive, your doctor will talk to you about treatment options. More detailed information can be found in the Patient Education Pamphlet, HIV and Pregnancy, by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and similar resources.

What if the HIV test result is negative?

In most cases, it takes approximately 4–8 weeks after you are infected with HIV for signs of it to show up in your blood. If the HIV test result is negative, it usually means you are not infected with HIV. In rare cases, you may be infected but the infection has not yet shown up in your blood.

If you have unprotected sex or share needles with someone who has HIV (and may not know it), you could get HIV at any time, even during pregnancy. In fact, there is some evidence that you may be at increased risk of HIV during pregnancy if you are exposed. Using condoms every time you have sex helps to protect against HIV. Also, do not share needles. If you share needles, have had a sexually transmitted disease in the past year, have had a new sex partner or more than one sex partner during this pregnancy, or have had a sex partner (or partners) known to be HIV positive or at high risk, you should be retested later in pregnancy. Even if you do not have high-risk behaviors, your doctor may recommend a second HIV test later in pregnancy if you live in an area with high rates of HIV or in a state that requires a repeat test later in pregnancy.

Facts About HIV Infection

In summary, the most important facts for you to know are the following:

- HIV can be passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy, at delivery, or during breastfeeding.
- Knowing you have HIV infection means you can get the special care you need during pregnancy and delivery. This care includes taking special medication for HIV, sometimes undergoing a cesarean delivery, and avoiding breastfeeding. With treatment, almost 99% of infected women have uninfected babies. However, without treatment, 1 in 4 babies will become infected.
- Taking medication for HIV can greatly improve your own health.
- HIV can be spread from an infected person by having sex without a condom or by sharing needles.

To Learn More

Your doctor can provide more information on HIV or refer you to other sources for education and counseling. Also, you may contact these sources for free, private information:

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW, PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6920
800-673-8444 or 202-638-5577
www.acog.org
HIV web site at www.womenandhiv.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road NE Atlanta, GA 30333
National AIDS Hotline (English and Spanish)
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
TTY: 1-800-232-6348
www.cdc.gov/hiv
e-mail: CDCCinfo@cdc.gov

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