

CYTOMEGALOVIRUS (CMV) AND PREGNANCY

What is CMV?

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is a virus that infects 50% to 85% of adults in the United States by 40 years of age. Once a person has been infected with CMV, the virus remains in the body for life, typically in an inactive (latent) form. Disease may occur again in persons with weakened immune systems.

What illness does it cause?

Most healthy persons who acquire CMV have no symptoms. Occasionally people will develop mononucleosis-like symptoms such as fever, sore throat, fatigue, and swollen glands.

Is this illness serious?

For most healthy adults, CMV is not a problem. About 1% to 4% of uninfected women develop first-time CMV infection during their pregnancy. Healthy pregnant women are not at special risk for disease from CMV infection. When infected with CMV, most women have no symptoms and very few have a disease resembling mononucleosis. However, about one-third of women who become infected with CMV for the first time during pregnancy pass the virus to their unborn babies.

Each year in the United States, about 1 in 750 children are born with or develop disabilities as a result of congenital (meaning from birth) CMV infection. Most babies with congenital CMV never have health problems. However, some may eventually develop hearing and vision loss; problems with bleeding, growth, liver, spleen, or lungs; and mental disability. Sometimes health problems do not occur until months or years after birth. Of those with symptoms at birth, 80% to 90% will have problems within the first few years of life. Of those infants with no symptoms at birth, 5% to 10% will later develop varying degrees of hearing and mental or coordination problems.

CMV infection can be serious in people with weakened immune systems, such as persons infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), organ/bone marrow transplant recipients, chemotherapy/radiation patients, and people on steroids. Such persons are at risk for infection of the lungs (pneumonia), part of the eye (retinitis), the liver (hepatitis), the brain and covering of the spinal cord (meningoencephalitis), and the intestines (colitis). Death can occur.

I've recently been exposed to someone with CMV. How will this exposure affect my pregnancy?

As previously stated, since 50% to 85% of women have already been infected and are immune, being exposed will have no effect on their pregnancy. When a woman who has never had CMV becomes infected during pregnancy, there is potential risk that the infant may have CMV-related problems. The risk increases if infection occurs in the first half of pregnancy.

I have had a blood test for CMV. What do the results of the blood test show?

Blood tests for CMV may show that you:

- Have already had the disease and do not need to be concerned. It is uncommon for the virus to become active again in someone who has had a previous infection and for the virus to cause infection in the unborn child.
- Have not had the disease. You may want to consider reducing your contact with children, especially those under 2 1/2 years of age.
- Are currently experiencing an infection. You should discuss this with your healthcare provider.

CYTOMEGALOVIRUS (CMV) INFECTION AND PREGNANCY

If I develop CMV, what do I need to do about my pregnancy?

If you were exposed to CMV, you should consult your healthcare provider for information about diagnosis, possible lab tests, and follow-up.

Is there any way I can keep from being infected with CMV?

There is no preventive vaccine. Most people with CMV have no symptoms, but they can spread the virus in their urine, saliva, blood, tears, semen, and breast milk. So, **throughout the pregnancy, practice good personal hygiene to reduce the risk of exposure to CMV.**

- Wash your hands with soap and water after contact with diapers or saliva.
- DO NOT kiss children on the mouth or cheek. Instead, kiss them on the head or give them a hug.
- DO NOT share food, drinks, utensils (spoons or forks), or cups.
- Clean and sanitize items contaminated with saliva. Clean and disinfect items contaminated with urine.
- Female childcare or school workers who expect to become pregnant should consider being tested for antibodies to CMV. If antibody testing shows that the woman has not had CMV, contact with children less than age 2 1/2 (where the majority of virus circulates) should be reduced.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.