

The Importance of Keeping Children Healthy During Pregnancy

Your Healthy News – Fertility Newsletter

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Keeping the family healthy is an important parenting task. During pregnancy, preventing illness becomes even more important. Certain childhood diseases can be very harmful to an unborn baby. If a mother becomes sick, she can pass the illness onto her unborn child. Illness in the unborn child may lead to birth defects and even death.

Rubella

Rubella is caused by a virus that is spread by coughing and sneezing. The infection lasts 2 to 3 days and may cause mild fever and rash. Rubella can lead to serious problems for your unborn baby. Babies born to mothers infected with rubella may have hearing loss, vision loss, heart defects, mental retardation and damage to other organs.

Chickenpox

Chickenpox is caused by a virus that is spread by coughing, sneezing and direct contact with sores of the infected person. Symptoms of chickenpox appear 10 to 21 days after exposure to an infected person. This virus will cause fever and an itchy rash.

Chickenpox during pregnancy can lead to several birth defects. Babies born to mothers infected with chickenpox may have scarring of the skin, muscle and bone defects, vision loss, seizures and mental retardation. Those who have had Chickenpox once before, are unlikely to be infected with the virus again. “For most people, one infection appears to confer lifelong immunity.” – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Cytomegalovirus

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is a viral illness that is spread through direct contact with the infected person or through contact with their body fluids. CMV illness does not typically display symptoms but can cause temporary or permanent disabilities when it is passed to the unborn baby.

Fifth Disease

Fifth disease is a viral illness typically seen in young children that will cause a “slapped-cheek” rash on the face. Fifth disease may also cause fever, sore throat and joint pain. Fifth disease in an unborn baby can lead to heart problems, infections and even death.

Prevention

Chickenpox and rubella can be prevented through vaccines. However, the vaccines for chickenpox and rubella cannot be given during the pregnancy due to potential harm to the unborn baby. Women who are thinking of becoming pregnant and have not had these vaccines or had either illness before should be vaccinated at least 1 month before becoming pregnant. For women who are already pregnant, it's especially important that all children within the household have had their childhood vaccines. Parents should ask their family doctor to make sure their children are up to date with all their vaccines.

CMV and fifth disease cannot be prevented by vaccinations. However, the chance of being infected can be reduced by proper hand washing, avoiding kissing young children on the mouth or cheek and not sharing utensils, food or drink with young children.

Making hand washing a priority with children is especially important during pregnancy.

Tips for proper hand washing include:

- Use of warm running water and soap
- Rubbing hands together to make a lather and scrubbing all over
- Scrubbing hands for at least 20 seconds – try humming the happy birthday song for two rounds
- Rinse hands under warm running water
- Dry hands off with a paper towel or air dryer
- Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet

Preventing illness in other children during pregnancy will help protect the unborn baby from harm and will help cut down on other illness like colds and flu. Ultimately keeping illness away will make for a happier, healthier household.