



CREDIT VALLEY  
THE CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL



## Infections and Pregnancy



### *How can Listeria be prevented?*

Wash hands with soap and water after handling raw food. Clean and sanitize all surfaces and utensils used for food preparation after use with raw foods, and thoroughly clean all fruits and vegetables before eating. Additionally, eat hot dogs only after heating to steaming hot, avoid eating non-dried deli meats, soft cheeses (feta, brie, camembert) if they are made from unpasteurized milk, as well as pate and meat spreads, smoked seafood and fish. Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat, poultry or fish.

## Toxoplasmosis

### *What is Toxoplasmosis?*

Toxoplasmosis is an infection due to a parasite that can be acquired by eating undercooked meats or by accidentally consuming foods contaminated with cat feces e.g. garden vegetables.

### *Why is Toxoplasmosis a concern during pregnancy?*

If a pregnant woman is infected during pregnancy, there is a risk of infection of the fetus, which may result in visual impairment and damage to the brain.

### *How can Toxoplasmosis be prevented?*

Eat only cooked meat, garden with gloves, avoid changing cat litter, wash fruit/vegetables and practice good hand washing.

## Influenza

### *What is Influenza?*

Influenza respiratory infections are due to viruses that tend to circulate between the months of October and April. The virus is transmitted from person to person, via droplets expelled during coughing and sneezing.

### *Why is it a concern during pregnancy?*

Babies and pregnant women are at increased risk for serious complications of influenza, including pneumonia and death.

### *How can Influenza be prevented?*

Influenza can be prevented by practicing good hand hygiene and cough etiquette (covering your cough with your sleeve). Also, immunization of pregnant women has been shown to reduce respiratory illnesses not only in vaccinated women, but also in infants born of women who received influenza vaccine during pregnancy.

## References

[www.sogc.org](http://www.sogc.org)

<http://www.peelregion.ca/health/family-health/during-pregnancy/medical-concerns/infections.htm>

Motherrisk: 416-813-6780

CREDIT VALLEY  
THE CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL

2200 Eglinton Avenue West  
Mississauga, ON L5M 2N1  
[www.cvh.on.ca](http://www.cvh.on.ca)



# Infections and Pregnancy

Early and regular prenatal care can reduce the risk of infection and improve the health of women and their newborns.

The information contained within this pamphlet highlights some important infections that may occur during pregnancy or shortly after pregnancy. Consequences of infection, preventive measures and information regarding diagnosis and treatment are provided. For additional information regarding infections and pregnancy, speak with your healthcare provider.

## Varicella (Chickenpox)

### *What is Varicella?*

Varicella, or chickenpox, is an infection that results in rash and fever. Varicella tends to be more severe in adults than in children. Infected adults, including pregnant women, may also develop pneumonia, hepatitis and inflammation of the brain. After the initial infection, the Varicella virus will lie dormant in the spinal cord. In 15 - 20% of cases, the virus may “awaken”, causing herpes zoster (shingles).

### *Why is Varicella a concern during pregnancy?*

Most women (and their babies) are protected from infection with the virus, as they are immune, having had chicken pox or the Varicella vaccine. Women who are not immune may develop varicella (chicken pox) and, depending on the stage of fetal development, their babies may also be affected.

If mother develops chickenpox before 20 weeks gestation, there is up to a 2% risk of the baby developing ‘congenital varicella’. If mother develops the infection 5 days before and 2 days after delivery, the baby may develop ‘neonatal varicella’.

### *How can maternal Varicella be prevented?*

Women with no recollection of having had chickenpox or having received the vaccine should have their blood tested to look for antibodies. Women who show no evidence of immunity should receive the vaccine, **as long as they are not pregnant**. This will protect them from future exposures.

Pregnant women who are exposed to chickenpox should promptly seek medical attention if they have no recollection of having had chickenpox or having received the vaccine. This will allow for blood testing and appropriate treatment, if necessary.

## Parvovirus

### *What is Parvovirus?*

Infection with Parvovirus (Fifth Disease) often results in mild fever followed by a distinctive rash, with a ‘slapped cheek’ appearance on the face and lace-like appearance on the body. Infected adults may often also develop sore joints. By the time the rash appears, most persons are no longer infectious. About 50% of young adults are considered immune to Parvovirus, as they have developed antibodies from earlier infections.

### *Why is it a concern during pregnancy?*

There is a relatively low risk of becoming infected if a pregnant woman is exposed to someone in the infectious phase of the illness. However, Parvovirus infection in a pregnant woman can cause illness not only in the woman, but also in the fetus, especially if contracted during the first half of pregnancy.

### *How can maternal Parvovirus be prevented?*

Spread of this infection can be prevented by using good hand hygiene and proper disposal of facial tissues. Pregnant women exposed to persons during the infectious phase of the illness should see their health care provider.

## Listeria

### *What is Listeria?*

*Listeria monocytogenes* is a uncommon bacterial infection that can occur after eating contaminated foods. The infection often results in fever, weakness and diarrhea. Bloodstream infections and meningitis can also occur, usually in people with weakened immune systems.

### *Why is Listeria a concern during pregnancy?*

The fetus and newborn are at greatest risk from an infection in the mother. Listeriosis may cause infection in the amniotic membranes leading to miscarriage, stillbirth, or severe infection in a newborn. Antibiotics are used to treat the infection when it is diagnosed.