

**NOW
THAT I'M
PREGNANT
DO I
NEED
TO BE
TESTED?**



This publication has been produced
by the Population Health Division of
the Department of Health

Sexual Health Program
Communicable Disease Control
Branch
Department of Health
Grace Vaughan House
227 Stubbs Terrace
Shenton Park WA 6008

PO Box 8172 Perth Business Centre
Western Australia 6849

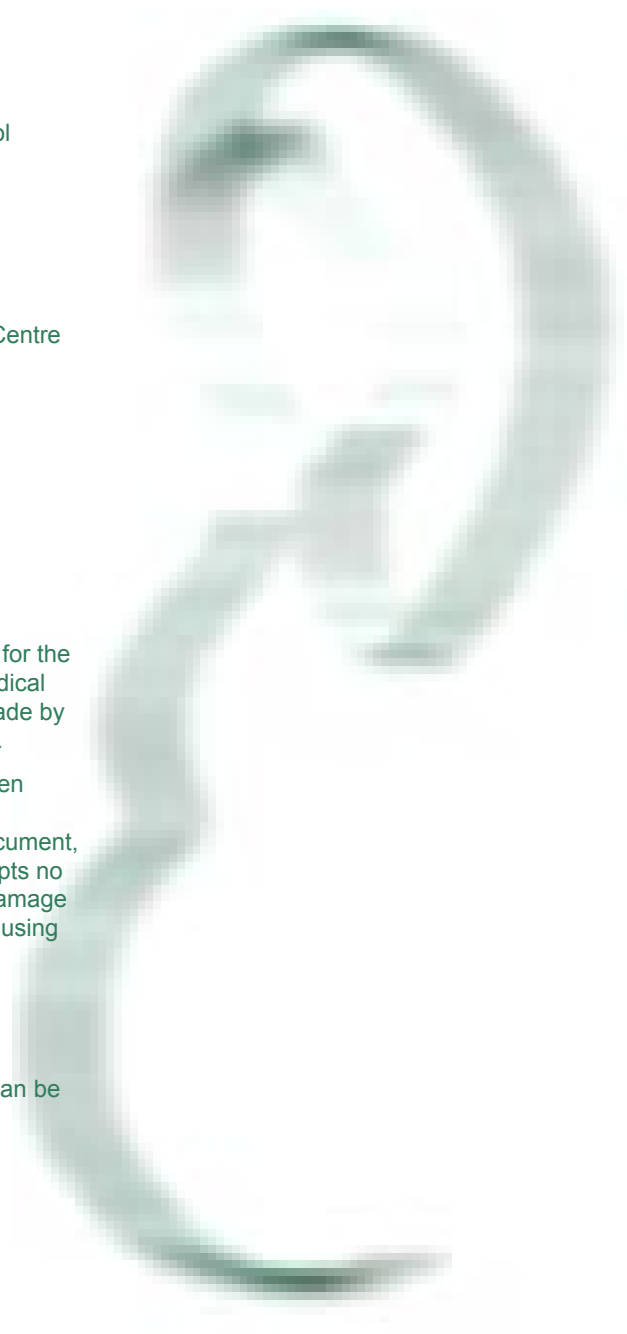
Telephone: (08) 9388 4999
Facsimile: (08) 9388 4848

This booklet is not a substitute for the
diagnosis and treatment of medical
conditions, which should be made by
a qualified medical practitioner.

While every endeavour has been
made to check the accuracy of
information provided in this document,
the Department of Health accepts no
liability for any injury, illness, damage
or loss incurred by any person using
information contained within.

Further copies of this booklet can be
ordered through HealthInfo on
1300 135 030 or
www.public.health.wa.gov.au.

© Department of Health 2002



NOW THAT YOU ARE PREGNANT...

DO YOU NEED TO BE TESTED?

There are many health issues that you need to think about when you are pregnant, including whether or not to be tested for infections. This pamphlet looks at testing for blood-borne viruses, to help you make an informed decision now that you are pregnant.

Why is testing important?

Testing women during pregnancy is not new. For many years pregnant women have been tested for iron deficiency anaemia, syphilis, and immunity to rubella. If problems are found early, women can look at treatment and care choices that will help them, and also their unborn baby. Early treatment increases the chance of your baby being born healthy and free of infection.

In recent years, other infections have appeared which can harm you and your baby if not detected in pregnancy, and treated if possible. These infections are caused by blood-borne viruses and include **hepatitis B**, **hepatitis C**, and **HIV** (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the virus that leads to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). These viruses attack the body in different ways, so the advice on testing will vary.

Early detection of a virus means infected women have the chance to get early treatment (if available) and care during pregnancy. This makes sure that the effects of the infection are reduced, and lowers the risk of passing the infection on to the unborn baby. Detection at **any stage of pregnancy** means that you can discuss treatment options and other ways of lowering the risk of harm to you and your unborn baby.

Some doctors think that all pregnant women in Australia should be tested to make sure these infections are found early and treated if possible.

How could you become infected?

Infection with a blood-borne virus can occur through:

- ◆ contact with infected blood or blood products e.g. needlestick injury in a health care setting, use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment
- ◆ unprotected anal, vaginal or oral sex (sex without a condom)
- ◆ sharing of needles and other equipment used for injecting drug use
- ◆ sharing of personal hygiene items, e.g. razors, toothbrushes or dental floss
- ◆ passing the virus from mother to baby.

Many women have no idea that they have a blood-borne virus. These infections often don't show any symptoms for a long time. You may also not know if your current or previous partner is infected.

What should you do?

If there is any chance you have an infection - if you have any doubts at all - **talk to your doctor or contact one of the services listed on the back page.**

If you are not sure about testing, you may have some questions to ask your doctor. Write them down as you think of them, and take them with you when visiting the doctor. These questions could be:

- ◆ Should I be tested?
- ◆ Confidentiality and privacy - who might find out?
- ◆ What happens during the test?
- ◆ When and how will I get the test results?
- ◆ What are the differences between HIV and AIDS, hepatitis B and hepatitis C?
- ◆ What does a positive or negative test result mean?
- ◆ If I am infected, how will it affect my unborn baby?

Informed Consent/Confidentiality

All testing for infection is confidential (private). For this reason, doctors will not give out test results over the phone, so you will need to see your doctor again to find out your test results.

Before doing any tests, your doctor needs to get your consent (permission), and make sure you understand what the tests are for and how they are done. Your doctor should also inform you about:

- ◆ the possible need for a second test
- ◆ the infection, including the long-term effects
- ◆ how the infection can be managed if the test is positive
- ◆ what treatments are available
- ◆ any possible side-effects of treatment, and
- ◆ how the infection can affect your unborn baby.

If your test result is positive, think about, and talk to your doctor about:

- ◆ Who needs to know about my infection (partner, family, other sexual contacts)?
- ◆ How do I tell my partner and/or sexual contacts?
- ◆ Are there lifestyle changes that will help me or others (such as diet, smoking, safe sex and drug use practices)?
- ◆ What counselling and support services are available?
- ◆ What treatment and care choices are available for me and for my unborn baby?
- ◆ How will the infection affect my unborn baby?
- ◆ How can I stop spreading the infection to others?
- ◆ Should I breastfeed my baby?

If your test result is negative, but you have been at risk of recent infection, there is still a chance that you are infected.

Your doctor will help you decide if you need to have another test.

Contact Tracing

If you do have hepatitis B or HIV, your doctor or another health professional will ask you about your sexual and/or other close contacts so that they can be told and offered testing. This is done very carefully, and your name can be kept private if you want. These contacts, who could be infected, can then be tested and treated if necessary.

Contacts not infected with hepatitis B can be protected by immunisation with the hepatitis B vaccine. Contact tracing is not carried out for all cases of hepatitis C.

By law, your doctor also has to tell the Department of Health if you have hepatitis or HIV. The Department of Health keeps track of many infections so it can better plan health services and develop programs to help stop infections from spreading. This information is completely confidential and will not be passed on.

Facts About Blood-Borne Viral Infections

HIV infection

HIV infection is caused by a virus that attacks your immune system, reducing your body's ability to fight off other infections. HIV can be spread by:

- ◆ contact with infected blood or blood products e.g. needlestick injury in a health care setting, use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment
- ◆ unprotected anal, vaginal or oral sex
- ◆ sharing of needles and other equipment used for injecting drug use
- ◆ passing the virus from mother to baby.

Once you get HIV, you have the virus for life, and you can pass it on to other people through contact with your blood or by sexual contact.

If you don't get treated, your body's immune system slowly breaks down, usually over seven to 10 years, and you get other serious infections and malignancies. At this point you are said to have AIDS.

Without treatment, there is a 1 in 3 risk of an infected mother passing HIV on to her unborn baby either during pregnancy, birth or while breast-feeding. However, treatment before birth reduces the risk of the baby getting HIV to about 1 in 50. Therefore, early detection of the virus through testing, and beginning treatment early greatly reduces the chance of your baby becoming infected.

Hepatitis C infection

Infection with the hepatitis C virus can cause liver inflammation and serious liver damage. In Australia, most hepatitis C infections result from the sharing of needles and other drug injecting equipment. You can be infected from sharing needles and equipment only once. Other ways that you can catch hepatitis C include:

- ◆ needlestick injuries in health care settings
- ◆ use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment
- ◆ having unprotected sex involving blood or damage to the skin
- ◆ sharing of personal hygiene items, e.g. razors, toothbrushes or dental floss
- ◆ passing the virus from mother to baby.

You may also be at risk if you had blood transfusions before 1990. Since then, all donations have been screened for the hepatitis C virus.

Most people who have hepatitis C continue to carry the virus in their blood and remain infectious throughout their lives. This means they can pass on the infection to others.

The risk of a mother passing the hepatitis C virus on to her unborn child during pregnancy and birth is low (around 1 in 20). Pregnant women should have a blood test if there is any chance they have been exposed to this virus. If infected, you will be given advice on diet, how best to look after yourself, and who to contact for support. Discuss with your doctor the available treatment and care options that are best for you and your baby. The risk of passing on hepatitis C through breast-feeding is very low as long as the nipples are not cracked or bleeding. You can't pass hepatitis C on to others through daily social contact, such as shaking hands or kissing.

Hepatitis B infection

A virus also causes hepatitis B infection, but is very different to the hepatitis C virus. While hepatitis B can also cause inflammation of the liver and can make you feel very ill, most adults recover completely and cannot get it again. However, up to 1 in 10 adults remain infected, and up to 90 per cent of newborn babies who are infected continue to carry the virus.

Hepatitis B can be spread by:

- ◆ contact with infected blood or blood products e.g. needlestick injury in a health care setting, use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment
- ◆ unprotected anal, vaginal or oral sex
- ◆ sharing of needles and other equipment used for injecting drug use
- ◆ sharing of personal hygiene items e.g. razors, toothbrushes or dental floss
- ◆ passing the virus from mother to baby.

Women born in countries where there is a high rate of hepatitis B infection are more likely to be carriers, even if they have no high-risk behaviours. As symptoms of chronic hepatitis B can take a long time to show, many women don't know that they are infected. Therefore, all pregnant women in Australia should be tested for hepatitis B.

Pregnant women who have hepatitis B should have their babies vaccinated with the hepatitis B vaccine and immunoglobulin soon after delivery. This greatly reduces the chance of their babies becoming infected.

All newborn babies in Australia are now offered vaccination against hepatitis B infection. This involves a course of four injections, the first given at birth and the remaining three at 2, 4, and 12 months, at the same time as other standard childhood vaccinations.

It is unlikely that hepatitis B can be passed on through breast-feeding unless the nipples are cracked or bleeding.

Where Can I Get Tested?

Confidential testing and treatment is available from:

(Most of these services are free. Please phone first to see if you need an appointment.)

Your GP or a doctor of your choice

or

Royal Perth Hospital

Sexual Health Clinic

Wellington Street, Perth

☎: (08) 9224 2178

Fremantle Hospital

Infectious Diseases

B2 Clinic Alma Street, Fremantle

☎: (08) 9431 2149

FPWA (Family Planning WA)

70 Roe Street, Northbridge

☎: (08) 9227 6177

Women's Health Care House

100 Aberdeen Street, Northbridge

☎: (08) 9227 8122

Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service (Perth Aboriginal Medical Service)

156 Wittenoom Street, Perth

☎: (08) 9421 3888

King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women

Antenatal Care Bagot Road, Subiaco

☎: (08) 9340 1373

Quarry Health Centre (for under 25s)

Rear, 7 Quarry Street, Fremantle

☎: (08) 9430 4544

Fremantle Women's Health Centre

114 South Street, Fremantle

☎: (08) 9430 4545

For More Information:

Western Australian AIDS Council

664 Murray Street, West Perth

☎: (08) 9482 0000

☎: AIDSLine (08) 9482 0044

Hepatitis Council of WA

☎: (08) 9328 8538

Toll-free: 1800 800 070 (country callers)

Communicable Disease Control Branch Department of Health

☎: (08) 9388 4999

The Department of Health has pamphlets on HIV, hepatitis C and hepatitis B. You can get these from:

HealthInfo 1300 135 030

or

www.public.health.wa.gov.au

Regional Public Health Units

*(Those **in bold** provide clinical services)*

Albany (08) 9892 2662

Bunbury (08) 9792 2500

Carnarvon (08) 9941 0560

Derby (08) 9191 1144

Geraldton (08) 9956 1950

Kalgoorlie (08) 9091 2622

Northam (08) 9622 0120

South Hedland (08) 9140 2377



Department of Health Government of **Western Australia**

Produced by the Communicable Disease Control Branch
Population Health Division

© Department of Health 2002

OA3200