

# Planning for Pregnancy

## WOMEN WITH HEPATITIS C

### Background

The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a blood-borne disease that damages the liver. In the United States, 1-4% of pregnant women have HCV. The most common way to get HCV is from sharing needles. Other ways to get HCV include sharing devices for non-injection drug use (such as from non-licensed tattoo and/or piercings parlors), from contact with infected blood, and through sexual intercourse.

### How Hepatitis C Affects Pregnancy

During pregnancy, it is possible for the baby to get HCV from an infected mother. Since the mother and baby share blood, oxygen, and food while the baby grows, the virus can be passed to the baby in this way. The risk of passing HCV to a fetus is 1 in 20, but increases if the mother has human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and if the mother is not receiving HIV treatment. The risk is also dependent on how much of the HCV is in the mother's system. Women do not need to have a Cesarean birth because of HCV. Breastfeeding is safe for most women with HCV.

### How Pregnancy Affects Hepatitis C

Pregnancy usually does not make HCV worse. Pregnancy will place additional work on the mother's liver that may already be stressed by the virus. If the mother has liver damage or scars with cirrhosis, she may develop a condition known as acute fatty liver of pregnancy, which can be serious. She should have her liver function monitored closely by her provider or a liver specialist.

### How Medications for Hepatitis C May Affect Pregnancy

At this time, there are no treatments for HCV that are approved for use during pregnancy. Newer direct-acting antivirals should only be used during pregnancy in the setting of a clinical trial. Otherwise, therapy should be delayed until after the birth of the baby. If a woman or her partner is taking ribavirin, pregnancy should be actively avoided. Ribavirin has been shown to cause birth defects in animals. Ribavirin can last in the body for months after treatment is finished. Two forms of birth control are recommended during ribavirin treatment and for 6 months after treatment of either the woman or her partner.

### What You Can Do

- 1) Discuss if you should be screened for HCV with your health care provider.
- 2) Stop behaviors that put you at risk: sharing needles, tattoos and/or piercings from non-licensed parlors, and/or unsafe sexual behaviors.
- 3) If you have HCV, get preconception counseling and avoid drinking alcohol. Talk about your medications (including over-the-counter medications and supplements) with your health care provider.

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This information is available on the WAPC Web site at [www.perinatalweb.org](http://www.perinatalweb.org).

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