

infections and immunizations

Whether or not you are planning a pregnancy, it's smart to reduce your risk of getting certain infections. If they occur during pregnancy—or if you get pregnant while you have one of them—some can cause serious birth defects, preterm labor, or illnesses in the unborn baby.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, are infections you can get by having sex even once with someone who is infected. STDs are very common. Usually you can't tell if your partner is infected. Some STDs can leave you unable to have children.

Examples of STDs include:

- HIV/AIDS
- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Genital herpes
- Syphilis

The chance of getting some STDs goes down if you use latex condoms correctly, or use contraceptive jellies or foams that contain a spermicide. Your chances go up if you have more than one sexual partner and unprotected sex.

HIV causes AIDS and is life-threatening to both mother and baby. In addition to sex, you can get HIV if you or your partner use needles to take drugs. Early medical treatment for HIV can help you stay well. It also may help prevent HIV from being passed to your baby. Because of this, all women should talk with their health care provider about being tested for HIV, even if they have no symptoms.

Infections

Some infections can be prevented by immunization. If you're not sure of your risk for these diseases, ask your doctor or other health care professional about getting shots to prevent them:

- Rubella, measles or mumps
- Chickenpox
- Hepatitis B
- Polio

You should not become pregnant for at least three months after these vaccines.

keep in mind...

- Even if you got shots as a child, you can still get some diseases.
- You can get more information about STDs by calling the STD National Hot Line at (800) 227-8922. For Spanish, call (800) 344-7432.
- You can get more information about AIDS by calling the National AIDS Hot Line at (800) 342-AIDS. Or go to www.ashastd.org/nah/nah.html online. Spanish service is available at (800) 344-7432.

You may be surprised to learn that more than 60 percent of all pregnancies in California are not planned. It may also be news that many birth defects and other newborn health problems occur in the first few weeks after conception—when you may not even know you're pregnant.

A baby's health is strongly linked to the mother's health before pregnancy. That's another important reason for you to stay healthy. Whether or not you're planning to get pregnant, it's important to follow these guidelines:

- Take a multi-vitamin with at least 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.
- Ask your doctor about your risk of diabetes.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Have a GYN exam annually.
- If you are being hurt by a partner or someone else, call a local shelter or crisis hot line. Also tell a health care worker you trust.
- Eat a variety of whole grains, fruits and vegetables every day and lower your intake of fat.