

How HIV can be spread from mother to baby - Pregnancy, part 1



Just because a mother has HIV doesn't mean the baby will become infected with HIV. In the United States, before modern HIV treatment was available, about 1 in every 4 pregnant HIV-positive mothers passed the virus to their babies.

Today, if a pregnant mother takes her HIV medicines and no virus can be found in her blood, her risk of passing HIV to her baby is less than one percent. Still, HIV passing from mother to baby during pregnancy and childbirth is the most common way that children become infected with HIV. This is called mother-to-child transmission or perinatal transmission.

An HIV-positive mother can spread HIV to her baby in three ways:

- **During pregnancy**

If the mother is infected, she can pass the HIV virus to her baby while the baby is still in her womb.

- **During vaginal childbirth**

When the baby passes through the birth canal the baby is exposed to any HIV in the mother's blood or other fluids.

- **Through breastfeeding**

A mother can pass the virus to her baby through her breast milk even if she is taking her HIV medicine exactly as she should.



There are reports of children becoming infected with HIV by eating food that had been chewed by a person infected with HIV. Babies should not be fed pre-chewed food.



Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.

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