Pregnancy and HIV medicines - Pregnancy, part 4

Before Pregnancy
If a woman is HIV negative but her male partner has HIV, the risk of getting infected with HIV while trying to get pregnant can be reduced but there will still be some risk. She can take HIV medicine called PrEP or pre-exposure prophylaxis, to lower her risk of getting infected.

The HIV-positive male partner can take HIV medicine called ART or antiretroviral therapy. ART will reduce his risk of spreading HIV to his female partner as they try to get pregnant.

If a woman is HIV positive and thinking about becoming pregnant, she should take ART. This lowers her risk of passing HIV to her baby when she does become pregnant.

During Pregnancy
Taking ART during pregnancy lessens a woman's risk of passing HIV to her baby during pregnancy and childbirth. By taking ART, the goal is to reduce the amount of HIV virus in the body to a level that can't be detected. This is called an undetectable viral load. ART protects the woman's and the baby's health.

A woman who is already taking ART when she is pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant should see her doctor as soon as possible. Most HIV medicines are safe to use during pregnancy but some should not be used.

Health care providers can talk with the pregnant mother about any risks with her HIV medicines.

Morning sickness with nausea and vomiting may make it hard to take ART. However, studies show that treatment works best if it is started before pregnancy or as early as possible during pregnancy. A health care provider can help manage side effects.

During childbirth
HIV medicine passes from the pregnant woman to her unborn baby. This transfer of HIV medicine protects the baby from HIV infection and is especially important during a vaginal delivery.
The baby passes through the birth canal and is exposed to any HIV in the mother’s blood or other fluids.

A cesarean delivery, also called a C-section, reduces the risk of mother-to-baby infection for women with a high or unknown amount of virus or viral load near the time of delivery.

If an HIV positive mother takes HIV medicines and has an undetectable viral load, her risk of passing HIV to her baby is less than one percent.

**After childbirth**
Studies have shown that it is especially hard for new mothers to continue to take their HIV medicines as prescribed.

The stresses and demands of a new baby mean that support for the new mother from family and friends is especially important at this time.

Taking ART as directed is important for everyone with HIV to live a long and healthy life.

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.