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Depo Provera and Pregnancy

The information below will help you determine if Depo Provera exposure during pregnancy represents an increased fetal risk. With every pregnancy, all women have a 3 to 5 percent chance to have a baby with a birth defect.

What is Depo Provera?

Depo Provera is a synthetic hormone similar to the female hormone progesterone. Another name for Depo Provera is medroxyprogesterone.

Depo Provera contraceptive injection is effective for preventing pregnancy for approximately 90 days but may be found in the bloodstream longer. It is recommended that women receive a shot every 90 days to prevent pregnancy. Depo Provera is not the same as oral birth control pills which contain other hormones.

Depo Provera can also be used to treat menstrual disorders and, at high doses, can be used to treat certain types of cancer. This fact sheet is written specifically for the contraceptive Depo Provera injection.

How does it work?

Depo Provera acts to prevent pregnancy by stopping the release of the egg during a woman's monthly cycle. If a woman does not release an egg during her monthly cycle, she can not become pregnant.

I got pregnant within three months of my Depo shot; will my baby be more likely to have birth defects?

High doses of the hormone in Depo Provera and other synthetic hormones have been associated with ambiguous genitalia in animal and human studies. These effects do

not change the internal reproductive organs or sexual behavior and are felt to occur infrequently (less than 1% of the time).

The majority of studies have not found an association between non-genital birth defects after Depo Provera exposure during the first trimester. In addition, children exposed to Depo Provera during pregnancy or breastfeeding did not show adverse effects on their long-term health or development, including sexual maturity.

Are there any other problems Depo Provera can cause?

One study found that babies born to mothers who received their last Depo Provera shot within four weeks of getting pregnant were a little more likely to have lower birth weight babies than those born to mothers who had unplanned pregnancies for other reasons. Other studies of mothers on Depo Provera have not supported this association. Further studies are needed to determine if there is an increased risk for lower birth weight if you become pregnant when using Depo Provera for contraception.

What are the effects on my baby if I was already pregnant when I received my Depo shot?

No studies have shown an increase in birth defects or long term health issues from use of Depo Provera during pregnancy. In addition, there is no indication that Depo Provera causes an increase in pregnancy loss

or miscarriage. However, when you know you are pregnant you should not continue getting the Depo Provera injections.

Are there any effects if I use Depo Provera while breastfeeding?

One study found that the amount of prolactin, the hormone necessary for breastmilk production, is slightly increased in women using Depo Provera. Based on this, it is unlikely that Depo Provera will decrease the amount of breastmilk produced. If, however, a woman is going to use Depo Provera, the World Health Organization has recommended waiting 6 weeks after the baby's birth to ensure that an adequate milk supply has been established.

In women using Depo Provera during breastfeeding the amount of hormone found in the breastmilk is small. Many studies have shown that the hormone in breastmilk appears to have no effect on the baby's long term growth and development. The use of Depo Provera has been approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics for use in breastfeeding mothers.



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