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Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus (LCMV) and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to LCMV can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus (LCMV)?

LCMV is a virus that causes symptoms similar to other viral infections, including fever, muscle aches, fatigue and gastrointestinal problems. LCMV is not thought to be a common virus in humans. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 2% to 10% of adults have had an LCMV infection. Rodents such as mice and hamsters carry the virus. Rodents kept as pets, in laboratories and in the wild have all been found to carry LCMV.

How could I get LCMV?

Infected rodents can transfer the infection to other rodents and humans. Physical contact or accidental ingestion of rodents' saliva, urine, feces or blood may cause an LCMV infection. Sweeping rodent droppings may cause the virus to become airborne and increase the chances of getting an infection. Human infection with this virus is more common in the fall when rodents move into homes.

How can I prevent getting an LCMV infection?

The best way to prevent LCMV is to minimize or avoid direct physical contact with rodents and their body fluids. A pregnant woman should ask someone else to change the litter of pet rodents.

When handling or cleaning rodents or their cages use gloves and wash hands thoroughly after contact. When cleaning litter, use a diluted bleach solution on visible droppings and surrounding areas. In areas that are heavily populated with rodents (such as barns, storage sheds, labs) adequate ventilation minimizes exposure. Wetting the area may also prevent the virus from becoming airborne.

How will I know if I have LCMV?

In humans, LCMV infection usually causes mild illness such as fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, muscle aches, headache, nausea and vomiting. A small number of individuals may become quite ill and develop meningitis or encephalitis (inflammation of the brain or spinal cord). Other individuals may not have any symptoms. Your doctor can order a blood test to detect this infection by contacting Focus Diagnostics at (800) 445-0185.

If I'm in my first trimester, will an LCMV infection cause a miscarriage?

During pregnancy, a woman who gets an LCMV infection may have an increased chance for a miscarriage. The data is very limited and the exact risks for miscarriage are unknown.

How does LCMV affect the developing baby?

A small number of children (49 total) have been reported worldwide with congenital LCMV (present at birth). Infants described as having congenital LCMV may have abnormalities in brain and eye development, as well as learning difficulties. The most common birth defects are hydrocephalus (fluid in the brain) and chorioretinitis (eye problems which can lead to vision loss).

It is unknown how many women have had LCMV during pregnancy and had healthy babies. Because of the limited amount of information about LCMV in humans, the exact risks for LCMV related birth defects are unknown.

If I get LCMV when I'm pregnant, how is it treated?

No special guidelines exist for treatment of LCMV during pregnancy; however, your doctor may prescribe medication if a blood test shows a recent LCMV infection. As with any viral illness, appropriate treatment of symptoms (such as fever) due to the infection is recommended.

What if I have LCMV while I'm breastfeeding?

No information is available about LCMV and breastfeeding.

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If you have questions about the information on this fact sheet or other exposures during pregnancy, call OTIS at 1-866-626-6847.