

AIDS & childbirth / AVERT.

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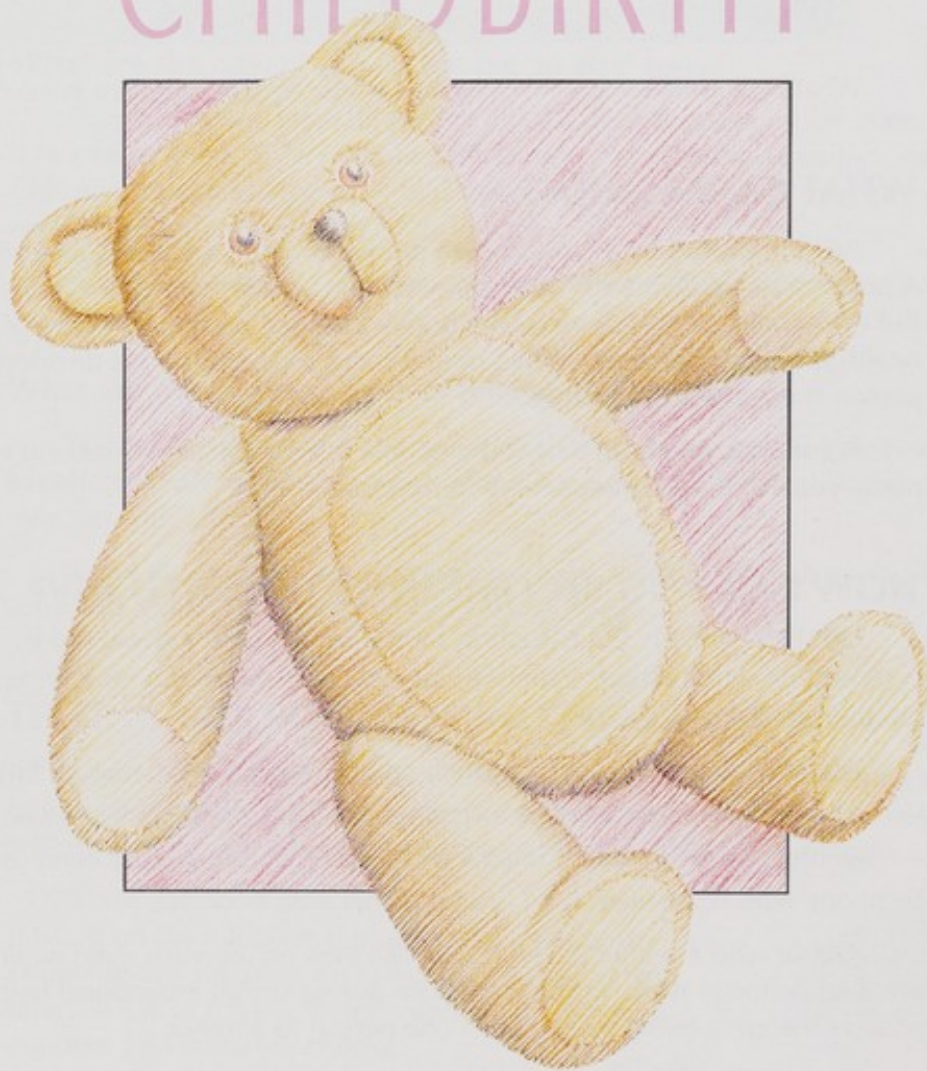
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CHILD BIRTH



AVERT

NEW
EDITION

INTRODUCTION

This leaflet covers some of the questions that you may have about AIDS and childbirth. We outline the facts and the choices people can make. However, as AIDS is a new disease there is still a lot we don't know about it.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS stands for:

ACQUIRED	— from blood or secretions from an infected person
IMMUNE	— the body's defence against infections
DEFICIENCY	— not working properly
SYNDROME	— a group of signs or symptoms

What this means is that AIDS prevents the body fighting infections in the normal way.

WHAT CAUSES AIDS?

AIDS is caused by a virus known as Human Immuno-deficiency Virus or HIV. A person infected with HIV may feel well and appear healthy for many years. But eventually, as HIV destroys the body's defence system, a number of different health problems develop. When one or more serious illnesses develop, the person is diagnosed as having AIDS.

We do not yet know why some people infected with HIV remain well for many years and others become ill fairly soon.

HOW CAN YOU BECOME INFECTED WITH HIV?

HIV lives in body fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. The virus is passed on when blood, semen or vaginal fluids infected with HIV, enter another person's body.

The most common ways in which adults become infected with HIV are

- by having sexual intercourse or intimate sexual contact with someone who is infected,
- by injecting drugs with a needle or syringe that has already been used by someone who is infected.

People who are infected with HIV can pass on the virus even when they look and feel perfectly well. Using a condom during sexual intercourse helps to prevent the virus being passed from one person to another.

Since 1985 all donated blood has been tested for HIV. Before then it was possible to become infected through receiving infected blood, but now the chances of this happening, in this country, are extremely remote.

HIV can also be passed on from an infected mother to her unborn child.

WHAT IS THE HIV TEST?

This is a blood test which can detect antibodies to HIV. HIV antibodies usually form within three months of a person being infected with HIV although for some people it can take longer.

If the test result is positive it means the person is infected with HIV. The test cannot tell us if the person will remain well or go on to develop AIDS. It only shows that the person is infected with HIV and is infectious to others.

A negative test result probably means the person is not infected. However, HIV antibodies take up to three months or longer to develop. So, if the person has been at risk recently, the test may have to be repeated to ensure that they have not developed antibodies since the first test.

What are the advantages of having an HIV test?

People that are at risk of getting HIV or think they may have been, can find it helpful to know if they are infected or not. If the result is positive, medical treatment can be started early and the person can make sure they do not pass on the virus to anyone else.

A negative test result can be very reassuring and can help to ease anxiety.

What are the disadvantages of having an HIV test?

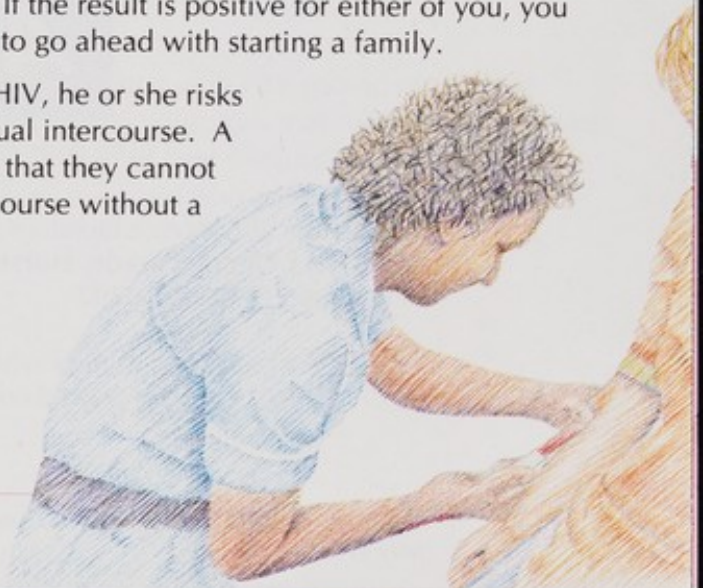
The test results should be confidential. However some people have experienced discrimination when others have found out that they are infected with HIV.

A few people who have been tested have found it difficult to obtain life insurance even though their test result was negative.

TESTING BEFORE BECOMING PREGNANT

If you or your partner think you might be infected, you may want to be tested before you decide to have a baby. If the result is positive for either of you, you will need to decide whether or not to go ahead with starting a family.

If one partner is infected with HIV, he or she risks passing on the infection during sexual intercourse. A couple in this situation may decide that they cannot take the risk of having sexual intercourse without a condom and therefore choose not to have a baby.



WHAT HAPPENS IF A WOMAN INFECTED WITH HIV GETS PREGNANT?

At present we cannot be absolutely certain about the effects on the mother or the baby if a woman is infected with HIV. Doctors need to study large numbers of pregnant women and monitor their babies for some time before we have definite answers. So, we can only deal here with the possible effects.

Possible effects of pregnancy on a woman infected with HIV

It is now thought unlikely that pregnancy increases the chances of a woman developing AIDS. But if a woman already has AIDS then some doctors think that becoming pregnant may cause the woman to become more seriously ill.

Possible effects on the baby

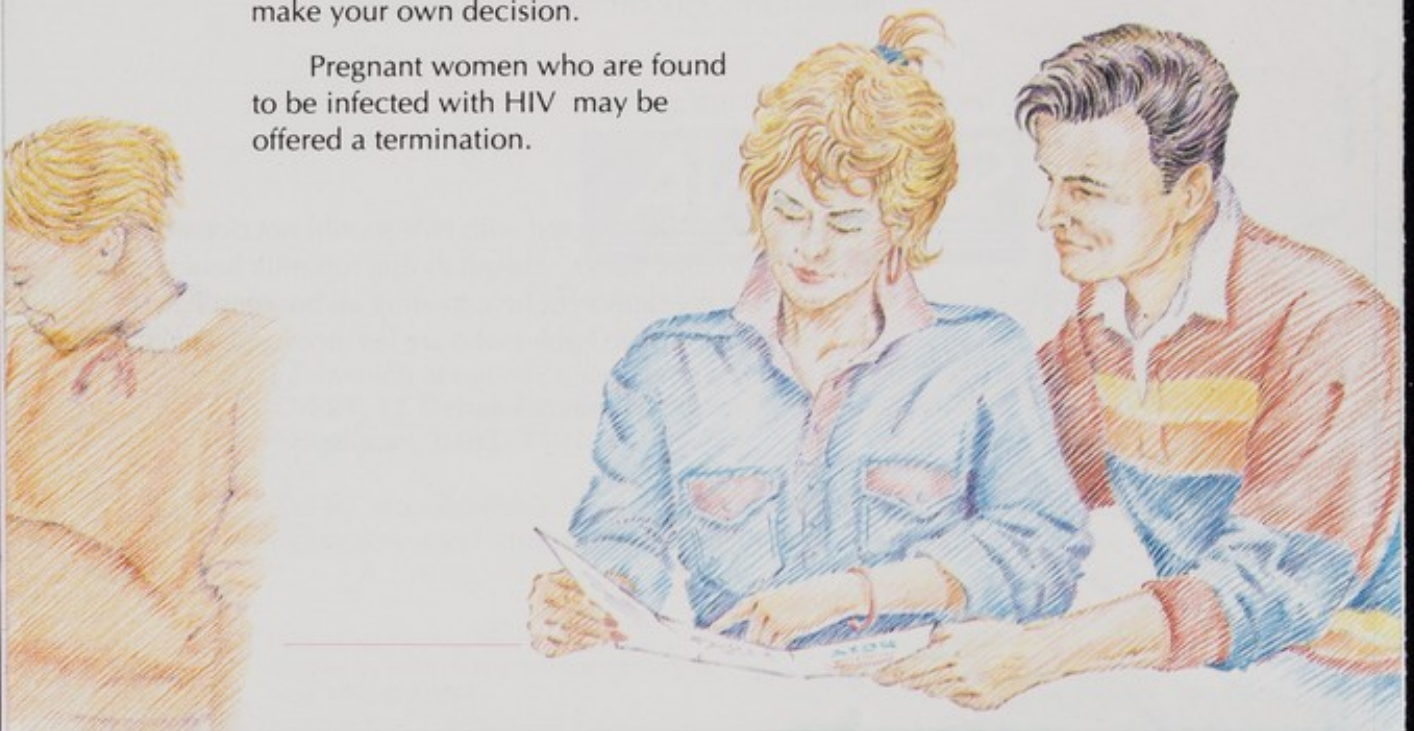
There is about a one in four chance of a baby being born infected with HIV. Some doctors think that a woman who has recently become infected, or a woman who has AIDS, is more likely to have an infected child.

All babies born to infected mothers are born with HIV antibodies. However many lose these antibodies as they grow older. So it is often not possible to tell until a child is 18 months old whether he/she is infected or not.

HIV ANTIBODY TESTING AND PREGNANCY

Some doctors offer all pregnant women the test. Others see no advantage in testing everyone and offer it only to women who have particular reason to think they or their partner might be infected. You should be offered time to discuss how the test might affect you, before you make your own decision.

Pregnant women who are found to be infected with HIV may be offered a termination.



Should the pregnancy be terminated?

We do not have enough information to be certain what is best. Some women infected with HIV decide to have the baby, knowing that the baby might be infected. Others choose a termination.

Women who are already ill with AIDS may decide to terminate the pregnancy. Some doctors think that a woman with symptoms of AIDS is more likely to have a child that develops AIDS. She will also have to think about whether she is likely to be well enough to care for the baby after the birth.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy is a very personal one, and is never easy to make. People facing this choice need good counselling and support so that they can decide what is best for them and be helped to cope with their feelings. Anyone who terminates a pregnancy for any reason needs time to grieve; someone who terminates because of AIDS or HIV will need to grieve not only for the loss of that baby, but also for the fact that they may never have another child.

PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

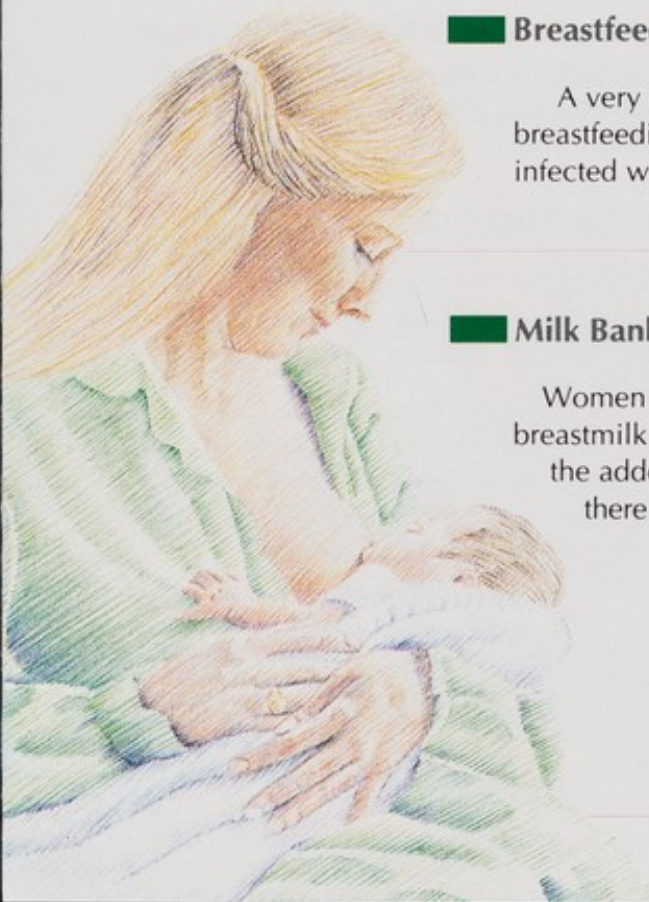
A pregnant woman who is infected with HIV should be treated in exactly the same way as any other pregnant woman. The birth will not be affected except that extra precautions may be taken during labour to prevent others becoming infected.

Breastfeeding

A very few babies have become infected through breastfeeding. So, when there is a safe alternative, most women infected with HIV decide not to breastfeed.

Milk Banks

Women who are infected with HIV should not donate breastmilk to milk banks. Hospitals that run milk banks, take the added precaution of heat treating all breastmilk, so there is no risk to babies who are fed from milk banks.

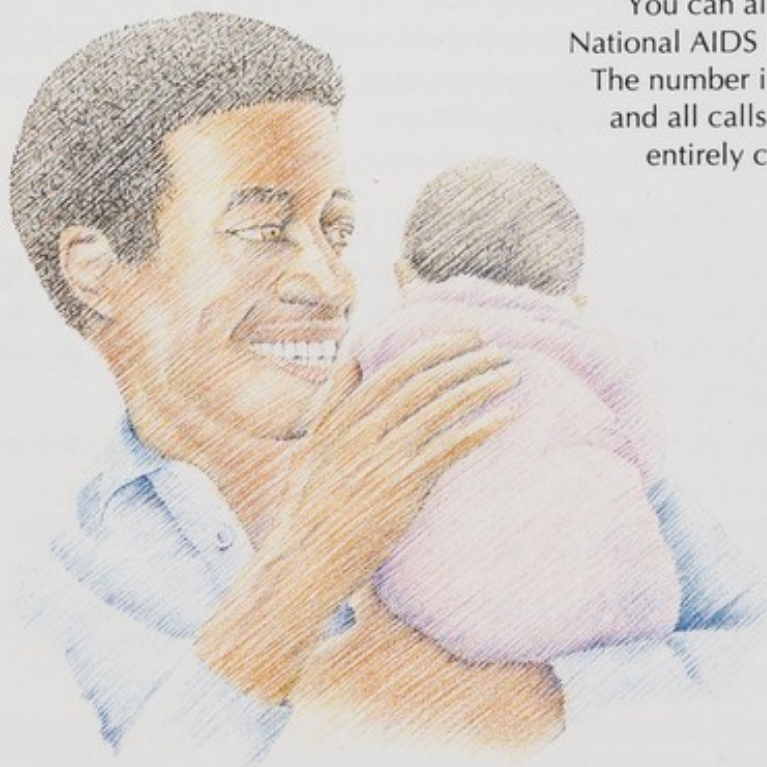


MAKING DECISIONS

It is often very hard to make decisions about AIDS and childbirth, because there is still so much we don't know. A great deal of work is being done to find out more, so our knowledge is changing all the time.

If you would like more information about what help may be available in your area, please do not hesitate to contact us by post or telephone. Your enquiry will be treated with strict confidence.

You can also phone the
National AIDS Helpline at any time.
The number is 0800 567123
and all calls are free and
entirely confidential.



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