



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Staying Healthy When a Baby's on the Way

*Knowledge and Practices of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Regarding
Cytomegalovirus Infection During Pregnancy — United States, 2007*

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

When a woman is pregnant, a top priority is protecting the health of her unborn baby. Cytomegalovirus or CMV is an infection that can cause serious birth defects in an unborn child. A person who is infected with CMV, including children who seem healthy, may have no symptoms and will usually recover without any health effects. Because CMV can result in such serious harm, it's important for prospective mothers and their doctors to understand the importance of preventing CMV infection in women who are pregnant or may become pregnant.

Dr. Michael Cannon, a researcher with a CDC infection prevention program, is here to tell us more about this type of infection. Welcome to the show, Dr. Cannon.

[Dr. Cannon] Thank you.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Cannon, let's start with cytomegalovirus or CMV. What is this?

[Dr. Cannon] CMV is a virus that a lot of people have been infected with, and usually, it doesn't cause any problems. You or I might get infected and we wouldn't even notice it or we might have flu-like symptoms. So, it's very common in the population - probably more than half of the people in the U.S. have been infected. The problem occurs is when a woman is pregnant and, either she becomes infected for the first time during her pregnancy, or occasionally she can even get a second infection and it can cause some damage to her unborn baby.

[Matthew Reynolds] O.K. Well let's start with the virus and then we'll move to women who are pregnant or may become pregnant. You're saying that a number of people have been infected with this virus. I gather then that this is not a serious virus to the adult population?

[Dr. Cannon] That's correct. Unless someone has problems with their immune system, they normally do just fine if they're infected.

[Matthew Reynolds] How do they even know they're infected?

[Dr. Cannon] Usually people don't even know, and there's not really a reason to go get tested, to find out, in general. And people get infected a number of different ways. It's usually by close contact with another person. It could be a baby who's breast feeding and gets it from her mom. It could be through exposure to things like saliva or urine in the environment. Young kids will have a lot of the virus and that's a way other people, even adults, can get the virus, as well.

[Matthew Reynolds] O.K. So we've talked about the fact that CMV isn't necessarily dangerous to adults, but it does present risks to unborn babies. Talk about those for a moment, if you will.

[Dr. Cannon] O.K. So, if a newborn is affected by 'congenital CMV' we call it because they get infected during the pregnancy, then they can have some pretty bad outcomes. For instance, they can have hearing loss, or experience vision loss, or mental retardation. Those are really the big three concerns, and kids can have one of them and not the others or they could have all three, and the severity really ranges. You can get children who have very mild problems and others who have very severe problems; they can even die from it.

[Matthew Reynolds] Let's put this into perspective in terms of numbers or probabilities. For your average mother-to-be, what's the likelihood that she's going to run into CMV or that a doctor seeing a patient is going to see one with CMV?

[Dr. Cannon] Well, maybe let's start by talking about the babies. If you had a thousand babies that were born in the United States, one or two of them would end up having some of these difficulties, like the hearing loss or the mental retardation.

[Matthew Reynolds] If a woman is pregnant or planning to become pregnant, what can she do to prevent infection with CMV?

[Dr. Cannon] Well, that's a really good question. Doctors should be telling their patients that a lot of the way the virus is spread to the pregnant woman is from young children, especially pre-school age children. They tend to be sloppy and have the messy diapers or have the urine in the environment and that's where the mother runs the risk and what she really needs to do is just avoid those fluids. So, you wash your hands carefully after changing a diaper. You try to not kiss your young child on the lips or if they have a sloppy cheek, kiss them on the head – give them a big hug. But whenever you have that exposure to some sort of fluid from a young child, you just try and be prudent and careful and no need to panic about it. It's not easily transmitted or spread to the mother, but you just try and take these special precautions.

[Matthew Reynolds] So, if a woman who is pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant is in a home with other babies, other toddlers, or has exposure to or interaction with them, she should be careful but not something that should preoccupy her to the extent that she just avoids interaction all together?

[Dr. Cannon] That's exactly right.

[Matthew Reynolds] So listeners, make sure that you wash those hands, especially if you're pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant.

[Dr. Cannon] Yes – when you're around young children. I mean good hand hygiene's good for every reason, but as far as CMV goes, the biggest risk is the young children.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well, where can our listeners go to get more information about CMV infection and pregnancy?

[Dr. Cannon] A good resource for that is the CDC website, which is www.cdc.gov/cmV.

[Matthew Reynolds] Well, Dr. Cannon, thank you so much for joining us today.

[Dr. Cannon] You're very welcome. Thank you.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.