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**July 31, 1991**

**TO:** **Aura Blard**
**Editor - AIDS Alert**

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***Please refer to the attached page of corrections for the first section as well as corrections and comments within the body of the text.***

First Section

Bold face = changes by CB Wofsy

Pregnant women should consider **getting counseling and testing** for the AIDS virus, even if **they feel** there is little chance they could be infected, physicians say. **In some large hospitals in major metropolitan cities, up to 2% of women are infected with HIV. As many as half did not know they had been exposed.**

The chances of a woman infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS, delivering a baby who is also infected are between **12%** and **35%**, says Constance B. Wofsy, M.D., Co-Director of AIDS Activities and Acting Chief of Infectious Diseases at San Francisco General Hospital.

{*Although it would seem..... - delete)* Wofsy says that not all babies are born with HIV infection because mother and child have completely separate bloodstreams during pregnancy, meaning no actual blood is exchanged. But the **virus may go from mother to fetus via other cells in the placenta or infect the child at birth.**

**Many** babies born to HIV-infected women test positive at birth **because** {*but those test results.....inaccurate - delete*} the test will detect the mother's antibodies to the virus, which the mother passed on to the baby. An accurate test of the baby's blood **for the baby's antibodies** cannot be made for months. **New methods to find out if the baby is truly infected soon after birth are being developed.**

Wofsy says all pregnant women should seriously consider their past experiences to determine whether they have been exposed to the virus through sexual intercourse or intravenous drug use.

Any pregnant woman or any woman who is considering becoming pregnant should be **counseled and** tested for HIV if there is even a slight chance she could be infected.

"I would recommend that a pregnant woman who has any possibility of **exposure**, whether she think's she's been or not, be tested for HIV," Wofsy says. "She should be tested even if she does not have confirmed knowledge that her past sexual or drug partner was exposed. Suspicion is enough." **Counseling must go along with the testing - an explanation of what the test means and how to protect yourself, your sex partners, and the baby.**

- Should this be in testing section, CD.

# Pregnant women should consider testing for AIDS virus, physicians warn

In some large hospitals in major metropolitan cities, up to 2% of women are infected. As many as half didn't know they were exposed.

Pregnant women should consider being tested for the AIDS virus, even if there is little chance they could be infected, physicians say.

The chances of a woman infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS, delivering a baby who also is infected are between ~~30% and 50%~~ 12 35, said **Constance Wofsy**, MD, co-director of AIDS activities and ~~assistant~~ Acting chief of infectious diseases at San Francisco General Hospital.

~~Although it would seem that the chance of an infected woman delivering an infected baby should be 100%~~, Wofsy ~~said~~ says that not all babies are born with HIV infection because mother and child have completely separate bloodstreams during pregnancy, meaning no actual blood is exchanged. But the ~~baby can be infected~~ virus may go from mother to fetus in via cancer cells in the placenta or infect the child at birth. with HIV in other ways, before or during birth.

~~All~~ babies born to HIV-infected women test positive for infection at birth, ~~but those test results often are inaccurate.~~ because The test will detect the mother's virus antibodies, which the mother passed on to the baby. An accurate test of the baby's blood for the baby's antibodies cannot be made for months. New methods to find out if a baby is truly infected soon after birth are being developed

Wofsy ~~said~~ says all pregnant women should seriously consider their past experiences to determine whether they could have been exposed to the virus through sexual intercourse or intravenous drug use.

Any pregnant woman or any woman who is considering becoming pregnant should be tested for HIV if there is even a slight chance she could be infected. (counseled and

"I would recommend that a pregnant woman who has any possibility of having been exposed, whether she thinks she's been or not, be tested for HIV," Wofsy ~~said~~. "She should be tested even if she does not have confirmed knowledge that her past sexual or drug partner was exposed. Suspicion is enough."

says

## *HIV test should be routine for pregnancy*

**Keith Krasinski**, MD, an assistant professor of medicine at New York University and a pediatrician at the school's medical center, agreed with Wofsy that any woman who even suspects she could have been exposed should be tested.

"We think that HIV testing ought to be regarded as sort of a regular medical test for pregnant women, the same as you might test someone for syphilis or hepatitis," Krasinski ~~said.~~ says

Some studies have shown that 58% of the female intravenous drug abusers in New York City were infected with HIV, he ~~said~~ says. Krasinski's research in New York shows that about half of all pregnant women who admit being in a risk group refuse to be tested, he ~~said.~~ says

This is outdated? There are treatments.

But if a pregnant woman is tested for HIV and finds out she is positive, can anything be done? Not really. Interventions for the woman's health

That lack of treatment makes **Elinor Levy**, PhD, an associate professor of microbiology at the Boston University School of Medicine, less confident that testing should be strongly recommended.

"It's such devastating information to have, and there is so little you can do about it," Levy ~~said.~~ says "I'm not sure I would recommend it, but they certainly should have the option to be tested and make an informed decision."

Other than the usual counseling on the patient's own health and how not to spread the virus, there is little that physicians can do for an HIV-positive pregnant woman. There are no extra precautions the mother can take to prevent the transmission of the virus to her child, and there is no therapy to safeguard their health, Levy ~~said.~~ says

## *Abortion often discussed as option*

Although few physicians will go so far as to recommend that an HIV-positive woman have an abortion, most at least counsel the woman on that option. A recent poll of obstetricians and pediatricians by researchers at Emory University in Atlanta and the University of Birmingham in Alabama revealed that almost all physicians provided abortion counseling to HIV-positive pregnant women. switch

The poll showed that 91% of the physicians provided abortion counseling to HIV-positive women, and another 5% ~~said~~ say they would if their institutions allowed it.

Krasinski ~~said~~ says New York University Medical Center provides abortion counseling for infected pregnant women whose infection was detected early enough to make abortion feasible. But many women choose to have their babies anyway, either from apathy or in hopes that their baby will not be infected, he ~~said.~~ says

"Even pregnant women who have had HIV-infected children have had subsequent children," he ~~said.~~ says

"We've even had mothers who have had two and three HIV-infected children following their first HIV-infected baby."

Children born with HIV infection develop AIDS and die just like adults. Often, the baby develops AIDS and becomes ill before the mother. Few children live more than a few years.

But aside from the terrible consequences for the baby, is HIV infection any more serious for a pregnant woman than it is for others? The experts aren't sure.

"For the pregnant woman, there is a lot of controversy about whether pregnancy changes the woman's response to her own infection," Wofsy said. "I think you could say pregnancy puts stresses on the body, and it is not clear how much HIV further stresses the body."

Krasinski and Levy both said the research is inconclusive, but their opinions differ somewhat. Krasinski said it appears that pregnancy does not antagonize a woman's infection, but Levy said pregnancy may increase the speed at which a woman progresses from a simple infection to full-blown AIDS. "People infected with HIV are completely healthy at first, although they can transmit the virus. They slowly develop symptoms — sometimes over years — and finally are diagnosed with AIDS."

## *Pregnant woman not at more risk*

However, the experts agree that a pregnant woman is not necessarily at increased risk of contracting the virus. Even when exposed to the virus during unprotected sexual intercourse or intravenous drug use, not everyone becomes infected.

Levy and the physicians said pregnancy does not make a woman any more susceptible to infection than anyone else.

"There is no information that pregnancy increases a woman's likelihood of acquiring HIV, although research studies haven't specifically addressed that issue," Wofsy said. "Pregnant women don't need any special precautions against HIV. They should follow the same precautions as everyone else." ■