

# HIV and Pregnancy



## Yes, you can.

### What care will I get while I'm pregnant?

**Pregnancy is 40 weeks long with three trimesters (three month periods).** Usually doctor visits will be monthly for the first two trimesters (up to week 28). From weeks 28-36, appointments are every 2 weeks, and then weekly from week 36 to 40. This may change depending on your particular pregnancy.

Oak Tree Clinic provides care to pregnant HIV+ women in BC. It is located in Vancouver and works with doctors all over the province. The Oak Tree team will:

- Provide counselling, advice and support to you and your family.
- Assess your nutritional status, hormone levels and Hepatitis A, B and C status.
- Recommend the best HIV medication (antiretroviral therapy) combination for you. If you are not on medication already, you will probably start it in your second trimester of pregnancy (around 18 weeks).
- Take regular blood tests to monitor your viral load and CD4 counts.
- Offer you various pre-natal tests, for example, ultrasound so that they can check on the baby's development and health.

If you live outside of the Lower Mainland, visits to Oak Tree in Vancouver will depend on your unique pregnancy. You may come to Vancouver, or Oak Tree doctors will consult with your local doctor. Women outside of the Lower Mainland usually deliver in their own communities.

### What's the chance of my baby getting HIV?

**A baby can get HIV during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding. If you take HIV medication as prescribed, the chance of your baby becoming infected is less than 2% (2 in 100).** If you don't take HIV medication during pregnancy, the chance of your baby becoming infected is about 25% (25 in 100). HIV+ women are advised against breastfeeding to eliminate that transmission risk as well.

### Will I deliver vaginally or by Caesarian?

**Babies may be born vaginally or surgically (by caesarean section or "C-section").** A vaginal birth is best for mother and baby, but the doctor may suggest a c-section if, for example, your viral load is not under control with HIV medication.

### Once your baby is born

**HIV can be passed through breast milk so it's recommended that you avoid breastfeeding completely.** Ask Oak Tree Clinic or a support worker at Positive Women's Network about getting free formula.

Your baby will be on HIV medication for the first six weeks of his or her life. This doesn't mean your baby is HIV+. To determine your baby's HIV status, several HIV tests will be taken which look for the virus itself, not just HIV antibodies. The first test will be at birth and again at 2 weeks, 4-6 weeks and about three months. If at least two results are negative after 1 month of age, then your baby is not infected. At about 12-18 months, the baby will be tested again to ensure all antibodies have cleared.

**Do we need to take precautions if we both have HIV?**  
**If your partner is also HIV+, you can reduce the risk, but not eliminate it.** If you're having unprotected sex, you're putting each other at risk for exposure to another strain of HIV or other STDs. Talk to an HIV doctor before trying to get pregnant. Oak Tree Clinic is a good place to start. (See "How do I connect with Oak Tree Clinic?").

**How do I get pregnant safely if I'm HIV+?**  
**There are ways to reduce the risk of HIV transmission between partners while trying to get pregnant.** If you are HIV+ and your partner is not, you can safely get pregnant through self-insemination by having your partner ejaculate into a cup, then inserting the semen into your vagina with an oral syringe (available at pharmacy counters). Talking to an HIV-experienced doctor is a good idea. Oak Tree Clinic in Vancouver provides supportive pregnancy planning and prenatal care to HIV infected women and families in BC. (See "How do I connect with Oak Tree Clinic?").

**Can I have a baby if I'm HIV-positive?**  
**The decision to have a baby is yours, HIV+ or not. How is your health? Is your viral load under control? (The lower it is, the better). How might you react if your baby is born with HIV? (It's not likely, but it's possible). Do you know someone who could look after the baby if you can't?**

**What can I do to help protect my baby from HIV?**  
**A healthy pregnancy includes seeing a doctor on a regular basis, eating well, and getting plenty of sleep.** Smoking, using drugs or alcohol can seriously harm the development of your baby. If you have questions about substance or alcohol use during pregnancy, Healthiest Babies Possible is a great program that offers all kinds of information and support. Call your local health authority for the program nearest you. A doctor trained in caring for HIV+ women can talk to you about HIV treatment options, like what combination of antiretroviral therapy would best reduce the risk of your baby getting HIV. Taking HIV medication while pregnant is your choice, but your baby's chances of getting HIV are significantly lower if you take the medication. The long-term effects HIV drugs could have on people who were exposed to these drugs as babies are not yet known. Doctors at Oak Tree Clinic are part of a research team following children and teenagers who were exposed as babies, and can give you the most recent information.



**How do I connect with medical care at Oak Tree Clinic?**

**You can make your own appointment, or your family doctor or other health care worker/support worker can make the appointment for you.** You will be asked for some information about your health and medical history. Outreach workers are available to bring you to your visits – ask about this when you make your appointment.

**Oak Tree Clinic**  
 B4 West – 4500 Oak Street  
 Vancouver, BC  
 V6H 3N1  
 Tel 604-875-2212  
[www.bcwomens.ca/Services/HealthServices/OakTreeClinic/default.htm](http://www.bcwomens.ca/Services/HealthServices/OakTreeClinic/default.htm)

**How do I connect with other HIV+ women at Positive Women's Network?**

**The Positive Women's Network – a partner of the Oak Tree Clinic – provides support and information to women and communities living with HIV.** We offer free support services, including a food bank, lunch program, one-to-one counselling and education/prevention information to HIV positive women and communities.

**Positive Women's Network**  
 Suite 614, 1033 Davie Street  
 Vancouver, BC  
 V6E 1M7  
 Tel: 604-692-3000 or toll-free 1-866-692-3001 (BC only).  
 Visit us online at: [www.pwn.bc.ca](http://www.pwn.bc.ca)

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