Virus Infections in Pregnancy

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Infections in pregnancy and the effects that they may or may not have on the fetus and infant are of great practical importance for clinicians and policy makers. Accurate information is needed so that a pregnant woman exposed to a specific infection in pregnancy can be informed about the risks this has for her pregnancy and offered the most appropriate management. It also has implications for prevention strategies such as the appropriateness or otherwise of introducing a screening programme to detect a specific infection in pregnancy. Such a policy must be based on sound epidemiological information.

Virus infections in pregnancy are common but fortunately relatively few have been shown to have a deleterious effect on the fetus or newborn infant. Those that do include rubella, cytomegalovirus, parvovirus, varicella zoster, hepatitis B and HIV. Examples of virus infections known to affect the fetus and newborn will be discussed and issues relating to their management and/or prevention highlighted. As most maternal infections known to cause fetal infection or damage are not clinically recognisable, antenatal screening is often recommended. Information required when reaching a decision includes data on the local prevalence of the infection, the risk of maternal-infant transmission, the consequences of congenital or perinatal infection on pregnancy outcome, subsequent disability and the benefits of treatment.

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