



# Infections at risk in pregnancy (Infezioni in gravidanza)

TOXOPLASMOSIS, CYTOMEGALOVIRUS, SGB



*During pregnancy, women may be exposed to various infectious agents, some of which can be transmitted to the child, with sometimes serious consequences. This booklet provides useful information on the most dangerous infections.*

*Screening through examinations and the implementation of simple preventive measures can really make a difference to the health of the mother and the unborn child.*



## TOXOPLASMOSIS

(Toxoplasmosi)

**WHAT IS IT?** (Cos'è)

Toxoplasmosis is an infection due to a parasite that can infect many animals and **can be transmitted by eating infected meat**. The parasite can also be found in cat faeces and in soil in which an infected cat or other animal has defecated.

**HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?** (Come si trasmette)

The infection is not transmitted from person to person, but **through direct ingestion of the parasite**.

Pregnant women need to be particularly careful, because the infection can be asymptomatic or present mild flu-like symptoms, while still posing a great risk to the foetus.

**HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?** (Come si diagnostica)

Toxoplasmosis can be diagnosed **with a preconception blood draw**, or as soon as you find out you are expecting a baby. The outcome of the examination lets us know:

- if you have contracted the disease in the past (and therefore are immune);
- if you are negative and therefore at risk of contracting the infection during pregnancy (in which case the test will be repeated free of charge every 30 to 40 days);
- if you have the infection going on.

In the early weeks of pregnancy, passage of the parasite to the foetus is very rare, but when it occurs it can result in serious damages.

In the third trimester of pregnancy, it is more easily transmitted, but in most cases without consequences.

**HOW IS IT PREVENTED?** (Come si previene)

- Avoid consumption of raw or undercooked meat, sausages, cold cuts, and carpaccio (cooking foods prevents infection);
- wash fruits and vegetables well (even bagged ones);
- wash well utensils that have come in contact with raw meat or vegetables;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth after handling raw meat with unwashed hands;
- avoid direct contact with cat faeces. For cleaning the litter box, it is advisable to delegate another person. If this is not possible, empty the litter box every day while wearing gloves and wash your hands well immediately afterwards. Prevent cats from consuming raw meat and animal prey, favouring dry or well-cooked foods;
- For gardening or work in the vegetable garden, wear gloves and wash your hands well immediately afterwards.

## CYTOMEGALOVIRUS

(Citomegalovirus)

**WHAT IS IT?** (Cos'è)

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) causes a normally non-serious, often asymptomatic disease. Those who have contracted CMV in the past do not become immune.

The infection can become dangerous if contracted during

pregnancy, because **the virus can infect the foetus** causing malformations and developmental disorders, deafness, and mental retardation.

**HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?** (Come si trasmette)

Man is the only reservoir of infection. The virus is transmitted by coming into **close contact with infected people**, through saliva, blood, urine or sexual intercourse. The people most susceptible to the infection are those who work in close contact with very young children, in kindergartens or nurseries, because they may come in contact with children's saliva and urine.

If you contract CMV for the first time while pregnant, the risk to the foetus is higher; if you have contracted the disease before, the risk is lower.

**HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?** (Come si diagnostica)

CMV screening can be performed **through a blood draw**, but it is not routinely offered and is not among those provided free of charge by the National Health Service.

This is because the test cannot ascertain whether the foetus is positive or not, only whether the mother is positive. In addition, there are no therapies to prevent transmission of the virus from mother to foetus.

Determining with certainty whether the infection has passed to the baby requires amniocentesis, an invasive test with a certain percentage of risk. Even determining the passage of the virus from mother to foetus, it is not possible to determine whether the infection will have consequences and their severity.

### HOW IS IT PREVENTED? (Come si previene)

It is possible to limit the risk of contracting CMV by following some simple prevention rules:

- **limit close contact activities with children under 3 years old**, such as that in day-care centres;
- wash hands frequently, especially after diaper changes or after wiping the baby's nose or mouth;
- avoid kissing children under 5-6 years old near the mouth;
- avoid sharing foods, drinks, cutlery, glasses, toothbrushes, baby bottles, pacifiers with children;
- frequently wash toys and various surfaces, such as high chair and stroller.

## GROUP B BETA HEMOLYTIC STREPTOCOCCUS (SGB)

(Streptococco beta emolitico di Gruppo B SGB)

### WHAT IS IT? (Cos'è)

Group B beta haemolytic streptococcus is commonly found in the digestive and genital apparatus of adult subjects, in balance with other micro-organisms, without causing problems.

### HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED? (Come si trasmette)

The mechanisms of infection are unknown, except for the **risk of transmission from mother to infant during vaginal delivery**.

### HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED? (Come si diagnostica)

Pregnant women are recommended to have a **vaginal-rectal swab performed between the 36<sup>th</sup> and the 37<sup>th</sup> weeks of gestation**. It is a quick and painless examination that does not pose any risk. The outcome is believed to be valid for about 5 weeks.

### HOW CAN IT BE MANAGED? (Come si gestisce)

In case of a positive test, **antibiotic therapy** will be administered **during labour and delivery** to reduce the risk of neonatal infections.

In the case of negative test, treatment is not necessary; only in some cases, when risk factors are present, the need for antibiotic is re-evaluated according to medical indication and hospital facility protocol.