



THE GERM-SMART

PREGNANCY

Best practices for reducing infection risk while protecting the health of mom and baby.

01

Hands + contact

Simple habits to reduce everyday spread.

02

Food safety

Clean, separate, cook, and chill.

03

Baby impact

What certain infections can mean for the fetus.

AUGUST 2026 EDITION

For educational use. Your prenatal clinician's advice comes first.

CARE MAGAZINE

Five pillars of a germ-smart pregnancy

No pregnancy can be completely germ-free. The goal is to reduce avoidable exposure, recognize illness early, and get care when needed.

1

HANDS

Wash with soap and water for about 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available.

2

FOOD

Prevent foodborne illness with safe shopping, preparation, cooking, refrigeration, and leftovers.

3

AIR + ILLNESS

Use vaccination, cleaner air, hand hygiene, and practical distance from people who are sick to reduce respiratory spread.

4

PREVENTION

Keep prenatal visits, review vaccines, and ask before starting or stopping medicines or supplements.

5

SMART CONTACT

Use extra care with diapers, saliva, soil, cat litter, and other exposures linked with infections such as CMV and toxoplasmosis.

KEY IDEA

Think risk reduction, not perfection. Everyday life includes germs, and most everyday exposures do not lead to pregnancy complications.

Hands, surfaces + close contact

Clean hands before they carry germs to your eyes, nose, mouth, face, food, or shared objects.



Scrub palms, backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails. Rinse and dry well!

WHEN TO WASH

- ✓ Before preparing or eating food
- ✓ After using the bathroom
- ✓ After coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose
- ✓ After touching trash, soil, or animal waste
- ✓ After changing a diaper or helping a young child
- ✓ After returning from crowded public places

CMV SMART

Cytomegalovirus (CMV) can spread through body fluids such as saliva and urine. When caring for young children, avoid sharing food, cups, utensils, or pacifiers. Wash hands after diaper changes and contact with saliva or urine.

SOIL + CAT LITTER

Toxoplasmosis can be linked to cat feces, contaminated soil, and undercooked meat. If possible, have someone else change the litter. Otherwise, wear gloves and wash hands afterward. Wear gloves while gardening.

Food safety: clean + separate + cook + chill

Pregnancy increases the importance of food safety. Use a few repeatable kitchen habits to reduce exposure to foodborne illness.

1 CLEAN

Wash hands, produce, utensils, and worktops.

2 SEPARATE

Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from ready-to-eat foods.

3 COOK

Cook foods thoroughly. Use a food thermometer when appropriate.

4 CHILL

Refrigerate perishable foods and leftovers promptly.

PREGNANCY-FRIENDLY CHOICES

SAFER

Deli meats + hot dogs

Reheat until steaming hot before eating.

SAFER

Soft cheese

Choose products labeled as made with pasteurized milk.

AVOID

Raw or undercooked seafood

Avoid raw or undercooked finfish and shellfish.

AVOID

Raw or undercooked eggs or meat

Cook thoroughly; avoid foods made with raw egg.

DO THIS

Unwashed produce

Wash fruits and vegetables under running water.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Listeriosis during pregnancy can cause serious complications, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and premature delivery. Toxoplasmosis can also be transmitted to the fetus. Food safety is prevention - not a reason to fear food.

Respiratory infections: lower the odds

Flu and other respiratory infections can be more serious during pregnancy. Prevention works best as a layered approach.

01 Vaccination

Review the vaccines recommended for you with your prenatal clinician.

02 Cleaner air

Improve ventilation or filtration when practical, especially when someone is sick.

03 Healthy boundaries

Avoid close contact with people who are sick when possible. Consider a well-fitting mask in higher-risk settings.

04 Hand hygiene

Clean your hands after shared surfaces and before touching your face.

VACCINES IN PREGNANCY

ACOG's 2026 maternal immunization schedule recommends Tdap during each pregnancy, at 27–36 weeks. It also recommends influenza and COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy, with RSV vaccination for eligible pregnant people.

WHEN YOU FEEL SICK

- ✓ Contact your prenatal team for a significant fever or other concerning symptoms.
- ✓ Ask promptly about testing or treatment when an infection may be involved. Do not start or stop medicines without checking with your clinician.

How certain infections can affect the unborn baby

The placenta supports and protects pregnancy, but some infections can reach the fetus. Effects depend on the infection, timing, and whether the infection is new.

A SIMPLE PATHWAY

Some pathogens can cross the placenta or affect pregnancy through other routes. Possible outcomes range from no apparent harm to pregnancy loss, premature birth, or congenital disease.

EXAMPLES WORTH KNOWING

CMV

Congenital infection can sometimes cause hearing loss, vision problems, or developmental effects.

Reduce risk: Wash hands carefully around young children.

TOXOPLASMOSIS

Can cross the placenta and may affect the eyes or brain.

Reduce risk: Avoid cat litter when possible; cook meat thoroughly; use gloves with soil.

LISTERIA

In pregnancy, can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, or premature delivery.

Reduce risk: Follow pregnancy food-safety guidance.

RUBELLA

Can cause miscarriage or serious fetal complications.

Reduce risk: Review immunity and vaccine status with your clinician.

Exposure does not automatically mean the baby will be harmed. Call your prenatal clinician after a known high-risk exposure or concerning symptoms.

Sources: CDC congenital-infection resources; FDA food-safety guidance; ACOG infection-prevention guidance.

Your August germ-smart checklist

Small actions add up. Put the highest-value habits where you can see them - in the kitchen, bathroom, changing area, and near the front door.

DAILY / WEEKLY

- ✓ Wash hands before preparing or eating food and after bathroom use.
- ✓ Keep raw foods separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- ✓ Cook meat, seafood, and eggs thoroughly.
- ✓ Choose pasteurized dairy and pregnancy-safe ready-to-eat foods.
- ✓ Wash produce under running water before eating.

DAILY / WEEKLY

- ✓ Avoid sharing cups, utensils, or food with young children.
- ✓ Use gloves for litter or soil exposure and wash hands afterward.
- ✓ Improve ventilation when someone at home is sick.
- ✓ Keep prenatal visits and vaccine discussions on schedule.
- ✓ Call your prenatal team after a known high-risk exposure or concerning symptoms.

CALL YOUR PRENATAL TEAM PROMPTLY FOR

A significant fever, trouble breathing, dehydration, severe or persistent vomiting, a new concerning rash, a known exposure to a potentially harmful infection, or any pregnancy-specific symptom that worries you. If you think you have an emergency, seek emergency care.

SOURCES + FURTHER READING

- ACOG - 2026 Maternal Immunization Schedule and Maternal Immunizations.
- CDC - Infectious Agents and Reproductive Health; congenital-infection and pregnancy resources. FDA - Food Safety for Moms-to-Be and foodborne-illness guidance.

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