

Kofinas Perinatal

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TORCH Syndrome Caused by Cytomegalovirus (CMV)

What is TORCH syndrome caused by cytomegalovirus?

TORCH is the name given to a group of infections that babies might get from their mothers before they are born. If a mother has one of these infections during pregnancy, it can harm the baby. Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is one of these infections.

How does cytomegalovirus occur?

A cytomegalovirus infection is caused by a virus. The virus appears to be transmitted from person to person through contact with saliva, urine, and semen. The most common source of infection is probably from contact with young children such as in nurseries and similar social groups. If a mother is infected for the first time with the virus during pregnancy, the baby may become infected. This is the most dangerous case scenario. The risk for fetal infection with serious damage to the fetus is high. Fortunately, many prospective mothers are already infected prior to pregnancy and thus the baby's risk to be infected by the mother is decreased significantly to $\frac{1}{10}$. If despite the low risk the baby becomes infected, the risk of damage is limited to a small degree hearing loss. The reason is that the baby is protected from the mother's antibodies that cross the placenta and go into the baby's blood to protect the baby by killing the virus.

What are the symptoms?

Women infected with CMV usually do not have any symptoms. Symptoms they might have include swollen lymph nodes and tiredness.

Most infected babies do not show any symptoms at birth, but many develop problems later. Newborns infected with CMV may have or develop the following problems:

- small size
- small brain
- enlarged liver and spleen
- eye problems
- jaundice (yellowish skin)
- calcium deposits in the brain
- extra fluid that puts pressure on the brain.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will get a sample of blood for testing. The virus can also be cultured from your cervix or from urine by special testing. Many doctors do not test pregnant women for CMV

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because of the great difficulty in interpreting the results. It is ideal if the patient knows whether she is infected or not prior to becoming pregnant. Because of the above mentioned difficulties with the interpretation of the results, some times we can not have a definitive explanation for the testing.

How is it treated?

Currently there is no drug treatment for CMV.

How long will the effects last?

The mother may feel the effects of the illness for about two or three weeks, depending on her general health. A child born with a CMV infection may have lifelong mental retardation, deafness, or other birth defects. The severity of the condition is difficult to predict and depends on many factors, such as, time in pregnancy, first time infection and coexisting congenital defects unrelated to CMV.

What can be done to help prevent TORCH syndrome caused by cytomegalovirus?

If you know that you have never been infected before you should avoid contact with the saliva, urine, and semen of other people. If you have been infected already, there is nothing you can do during pregnancy to avoid congenital CMV infection of the fetus. In the post-partum period, you should handle the baby under very strict hygienic conditions -- washing your hands well when handling the baby and be careful not to expose the newborn to your saliva, urine and other body fluids that may contain the virus. Patients with chronic CMV infections carry the virus for life and excrete it at unsuspected times.

If you plan to breast feed your baby and you know that you have been infected with the virus, you must consult with your Pediatrician before doing so. Breast-feeding has been associated with increased newborn infection. Many Pediatricians advise to avoid breast-feeding all together. Please check with your Pediatrician before you decide to breast feed your baby.