Higher HCV Viral Load Raises Risk of Mother-to-Child Transmission

Women who had both hepatitis C and HIV were most likely to pass HCV on to their newborns.

March 7, 2023 By Sukanya Charuchandra

Pregnant women with hepatitis C virus (HCV) who have a high viral load are at greater risk of transmitting HCV to their babies compared to those without active infection, according to study findings published in the Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology.

Zilian Wang, MD, of the First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University in China, and colleagues conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the links between maternal HCV viral load, coinfection with HIV and the risk of vertical transmission.

The researchers scanned various medical literature databases, including Medline, Embase and WHO Global Index Medicus, as well as conference proceedings from inception through June 2022. The final meta-analysis spanned 26 studies, which together included 4,934 infants born to mothers with hepatitis C.

Pregnant women with detectable HCV, indicating active infection, were at greater risk of transmitting the virus to their newborns than women with undetectable HCV viral load. Women with an HCV viral load of 6 log (1,000,000 copies/milliliter) or greater were more likely to pass on the virus to their newborns than those with a lower viral load.

What's more, the researchers also found that women with both HCV and HIV had a greater risk for vertical transmission than women with HCV alone.

"The incidence of HCV mother-to-child transmission was increased among pregnant women with detectable HCV viremia" and was even higher among those with a viral load of 1,000,000 copies or more, the researchers concluded. "HIV coinfection further increased the risk for HCV mother-to-child-transmission."

Click here to read the study in the Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology.
Click here for more news about hepatitis C and pregnancy.
