Hepatitis C and Pregnancy

December 11, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Hepatitis C virus infection is on the rise among women giving birth. Subsequently, this puts a new generation at risk for hepatitis C. This is according to a report by Stephen W. Patrick, MD and colleagues published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in May 2017.

I don't have to spell out what this means. We baby boomers lived through this. We know the ache of having our children tested, waiting for the results, and then the hell that comes after when the tests show our child has hepatitis C. Few stories sink my heart more than when I am talking to a mother whose child was infected as a result of mother-to-child transmission (known as vertical transmission).

Women of childbirth age have long been confused about the multi-faceted issues related to pregnancy and breastfeeding. The various obstetric and gynecological organizations have not addressed these issues thoroughly. However, recently the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine issued recommendations for pregnant women with hepatitis C. These recommendations were endorsed by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). Here are some highlights:

- Routine hepatitis C screening for all pregnant women is not recommended. Instead, screen women who are at increased risk for hepatitis C.

For women who are pregnant:

- Hepatitis C treatment using direct-acting antivirals should only be used in the research setting or waiting until after pregnancy.
- Vaginal delivery is recommended over cesarean delivery.
- Internal fetal monitoring, prolonged rupture of membranes, and episiotomy should be avoided.
- Breastfeeding should not be discouraged.

On December 13, 2017, 12:00 pm Eastern, the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) will host a free webinar on hepatitis C among pregnant women. In NVHR's words, "The webinar will feature five healthcare professionals who will provide information about increasing rates of hepatitis C among women of childbearing potential and pregnant women. The webinar will also

include a discussion of whether expanded hepatitis C screening among pregnant women is warranted." Register here.

If you miss the webinar, NVHR has links to past webinars in its archive section.

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