PREGNANCY

Risks of HMPV in Pregnant Women

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Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) infections can pose specific risks for pregnant women due to the physiological and immunological changes that occur during pregnancy. While HMPV primarily affects the respiratory system, pregnant women are at an increased risk of experiencing severe complications due to their altered immune responses.

How HMPV Affects Pregnant Women

Pregnancy naturally suppresses parts of the immune system to protect the growing fetus, making pregnant women more susceptible to infections, including respiratory viruses like HMPV. While mild cases may present with common cold-like symptoms, severe infections can lead to complications, especially in the third trimester when lung capacity and oxygen reserves are already reduced.

Potential Risks of HMPV During Pregnancy

1. Severe Respiratory Symptoms

Pregnant women infected with HMPV may experience more severe respiratory symptoms, such as wheezing, shortness of breath, or pneumonia. These symptoms can cause discomfort, reduce oxygen levels, and lead to increased stress on the body.

2. Increased Hospitalization Rates

Studies have shown that pregnant women with respiratory viral infections, including HMPV, are more likely to require hospitalization due to complications like lower respiratory tract infections, hypoxia (low oxygen levels), or secondary bacterial infections.

3. Effects on the Fetus

While there is limited research on direct transmission of HMPV to the fetus, severe maternal respiratory infections can indirectly affect the unborn baby by:

Reducing oxygen supply to the fetus.

Increasing the risk of preterm labor due to maternal stress or systemic inflammation.

Potentially leading to low birth weight or growth restriction.

4. Risk of Co-Infections

Pregnant women with HMPV are at a higher risk of developing co-infections, such as bacterial pneumonia, which can further complicate the pregnancy and require intensive medical intervention.

5. Exacerbation of Pre-Existing Conditions

If a pregnant woman has pre-existing conditions such as asthma or other respiratory diseases, HMPV can exacerbate these conditions, increasing the risk of complications for both the mother and the fetus.

Precautions for Pregnant Women to Avoid HMPV

To minimize the risks of HMPV, pregnant women should take extra precautions, including:

- Avoid Exposure: Limit contact with individuals who are sick or showing symptoms of respiratory infections.

- Practice Hygiene: Wash hands frequently, avoid touching the face, and clean commonly used surfaces.
- Wear Masks: Consider wearing a mask in crowded or high-risk areas, especially during peak seasons for respiratory viruses.
- Boost Immunity: Maintain a healthy diet, stay hydrated, and get adequate rest to support the immune system.
- Stay Informed: Monitor local health advisories for outbreaks of respiratory illnesses, including HMPV.

When to Seek Medical Attention

- Pregnant women should seek immediate medical care if they experience:
- Difficulty breathing or persistent shortness of breath.
- High fever that does not respond to medications.
- Chest pain or severe fatigue.
- Reduced fetal movement or other signs of distress.

HMPV can pose significant risks for pregnant women, especially if the infection becomes severe. The immune changes during pregnancy increase susceptibility to respiratory infections, which may lead to complications for both the mother and the fetus. Taking proactive steps to prevent infection, such as practicing good hygiene and avoiding sick individuals, is crucial. Pregnant women experiencing severe symptoms should seek medical care promptly to ensure the health and safety of both themselves and their baby.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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