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MDHHS urges pregnant women to ask physicians about prenatal STD testing

LANSING, Mich. – During the month of April, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is recognizing National Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Awareness Month to highlight the importance of testing during pregnancy.

Many STD infections that can occur in pregnant women can also affect a newborn baby. However, the transmission of these infections to the baby may be prevented with proper testing during pregnancy. Testing pregnant women for HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis multiple times during pregnancy will lead to better health outcomes for both the pregnant woman and her unborn baby.

“If a physician is aware of the woman’s infection before the baby is born, they can provide treatment to ensure the baby doesn’t become infected,” says Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive for MDHHS.

Every pregnant woman should be tested for HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis at their first prenatal visit. MDHHS recommends additional testing at 26-28 weeks. Pregnant women with high risk factors such as having an STD, using or injecting drugs, or having more than one sex partner, should also be tested for HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis B at 36 weeks or at delivery even if their previous tests were negative.

Testing is important because people often do not show signs or symptoms of having HIV, hepatitis B or syphilis. Pregnant women who are infected with HIV, hepatitis B, or syphilis can transmit their infections to a baby who would have a greater risk of becoming infected or developing severe health problems because of an infection.

Pregnant women with these infections may need to begin treatment during pregnancy. Early treatment greatly reduces the chance of the baby being born with the infection or having severe health outcomes. In addition to treatment in pregnancy the baby may also need treatment at birth to protect them from getting the infection.

In the past five years, Michigan has had three preventable cases of perinatal Hepatitis B, three cases of congenital syphilis and three babies born with HIV infection. MDHHS encourages all pregnant women to ask questions and discuss their risks and concerns with their doctor during their prenatal visits.

For more information, please visit www.michigan.gov/hepatitisB and www.michigan.gov/hivstd.

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