

# HOW CAN I PREVENT MY BABY FROM BEING INFECTED WITH HIV?

Without treatment, 20% of infected mothers can transmit HIV to their unborn or newborn babies. Long delivery time, mothers with high viral loads (large amount of virus in blood), and breast-feeding when HIV+ all contribute to the likelihood of HIV transmission from mother to baby.

## Mothers can reduce the risk of transmission by:

- Using antiretroviral medications
- Keeping the delivery time short or delivering through a cesarean section (C-section)
- Not breast-feeding the baby

The risk of transmitting HIV drops greatly if antiretroviral medications are used. Transmission rates are lowest if the mother takes appropriate antiviral drugs during the last six months of her pregnancy, and the newborn takes AZT for six weeks after birth. Even if the mother does not take antiretroviral medications until she is in labor, the transmission rate can be cut by almost half or more.

The risk of transmission increases with longer delivery times. If the mother uses

AZT and delivers her baby by cesarean section (C-section), she can reduce the risk of transmission to about 2%.

There is a 14% chance that a baby will become infected from the breast milk of an infected mother. This risk can be eliminated if HIV+ women do not breast-feed babies. Baby formulas should be used.

Pregnancy does not seem to make the mother's HIV disease any worse. However, some medications used to fight HIV or to treat infections might cause birth defects. This is especially true during the first 3 months of pregnancy. If a mother chooses to stop taking some medications during pregnancy, her HIV disease could get worse. A pregnant woman on HIV medications should consult with her HIV physician regarding appropriate treatment during pregnancy.

**All pregnant women should be routinely screened for HIV** so that appropriate measures can be taken to help prevent spread of HIV to the newborn baby.



## **Nebraska AIDS Education and Training Center**

*A collaboration of University of Nebraska Medical Center and Nebraska AIDS Project*

For more information on transmission, you may call the Nebraska AIDS Hotline at 1-800-782-AIDS or Nebraska AIDS Project at 402-552-9260. HIV/AIDS Basic Trainings or in-services on specific topics are available through the Nebraska AIDS Education and Training Center.