



Patient & Family Guide
2018

Ectopic Pregnancy

Aussi disponible en français :
Grossesse ectopique (FF85-1963)

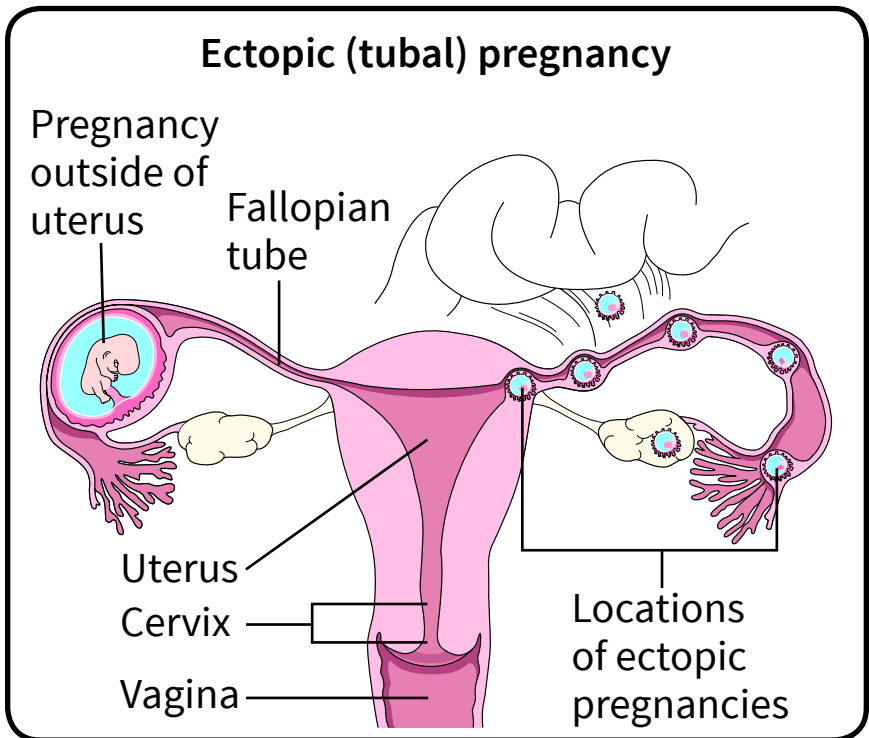


www.nshealth.ca

Ectopic Pregnancy

What is an ectopic pregnancy?

An ectopic pregnancy (also called a tubal pregnancy) is a pregnancy that happens outside of the uterus, usually in the fallopian tubes. This is a possible medical emergency and can lead to death if not treated.



What are the symptoms of an ectopic pregnancy?

- › abdominal (stomach) pain
- › missed periods
- › vaginal bleeding or spotting
- › pain while urinating (peeing)

If you have more severe (worse) internal bleeding, it may cause:

- › lower back pain
- › abdominal pain
- › pelvic pain
- › cramping or tenderness on one side of the pelvis

Ectopic pregnancy can mimic (look like) symptoms of other diseases, such as appendicitis or referred (felt in another body part) shoulder pain. It is most often misdiagnosed as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

What causes an ectopic pregnancy?

There are a number of risk factors for ectopic pregnancy. However, as many as 1 out of 2 women who have ectopic pregnancies have no risk factors.

You have a higher chance of having an ectopic pregnancy if you:

- › have abnormal or damaged fallopian tubes (e.g., from past infections or surgeries)
- › have had a previous ectopic pregnancy
- › are having certain treatments to help you get pregnant
- › smoke cigarettes
- › have had surgery on your reproductive system, bowels, or lower abdomen
- › are older than 35
- › use an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control

How is an ectopic pregnancy treated?

- If it is found early, your health care provider can give you a medication called methotrexate to dissolve the egg. The egg will either be reabsorbed by your body or pass with your next period.
- If you have already had a hemorrhage (heavy bleeding), you may need surgery.
- Your health care provider will follow up with blood tests to make sure that the ectopic pregnancy has been completely treated.

What are the possible complications?

The most common complication is that the tissue around the reproductive organs can rupture (break open). This would cause an internal hemorrhage (heavy bleeding inside your body) which may lead to hypovolemic shock. Hypovolemic shock means that not enough blood is circulating through your body. Death from a rupture is rare.

If I get pregnant again after having an ectopic pregnancy, will I have another one?

- Many women who have had an ectopic pregnancy go on to have healthy pregnancies.
- If you get pregnant again, it is very important to see your health care provider early to check where the pregnancy is.

Can ectopic pregnancies be prevented?

It is not possible to prevent an ectopic pregnancy, but you can lower your risk factors.

- If you are diagnosed with PID, take your medications as prescribed by your health care provider. Follow up with your health care provider to make sure that your PID is gone.
- Try to avoid getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Ask your health care provider for more information on safer sex and avoiding STIs.
- Talk with your health care provider about family planning options.

