

Syphilis in pregnancy and Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction (JHR)

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction.

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your doctor or midwife about what care is right for you.

What is a Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction (JHR)?

JHR is a non-allergic reaction that can happen after antibiotics are given to treat certain types of infections. Syphilis is one of the infections where this type of reaction can happen. Less than half (about 44%) of pregnant women who are treated for syphilis will have this reaction—however, most of the time symptoms resolve on their own.

What happens if you have a JHR reaction?

Symptoms usually appear 2–12 hours after treatment and they usually disappear on their own by 24 hours. If you get JHR you might:

- Feel hot (fever)
- Feel extra tired (malaise)
- Sweat a lot
- Have a headache
- Have pain in your joints
- Have a fast heart beat

Can JHR harm your baby?

The risks to your baby from a JHR reaction are lower than the risks of not having treatment. After treatment for syphilis, some women may feel contractions or go into early labour. Sometimes your baby's movements or heart beat can change. Your health care provider may suggest that you stay in hospital so you and your baby can be observed closely. You are more likely to need extra care if there are concerns about your baby or if you:

- Are more than 24 weeks pregnant
- Have high levels of syphilis on your blood test
- Also have HIV

Is there any treatment for JHR?

There is no treatment for JHR. Most women will only need to rest, eat well and drink plenty of water until the symptoms pass. Simple pain medications (e.g. paracetamol) can help with symptoms. Talk with your health care provider before taking any medications. What should you do if you get JHR?

If you are having any symptoms of JHR after treatment, or don't feel well, tell your healthcare provider. If you are at home, telephone or go to your local hospital. It will be important to tell them that you have received treatment for syphilis and when the treatment started. They will advise you on what to do.

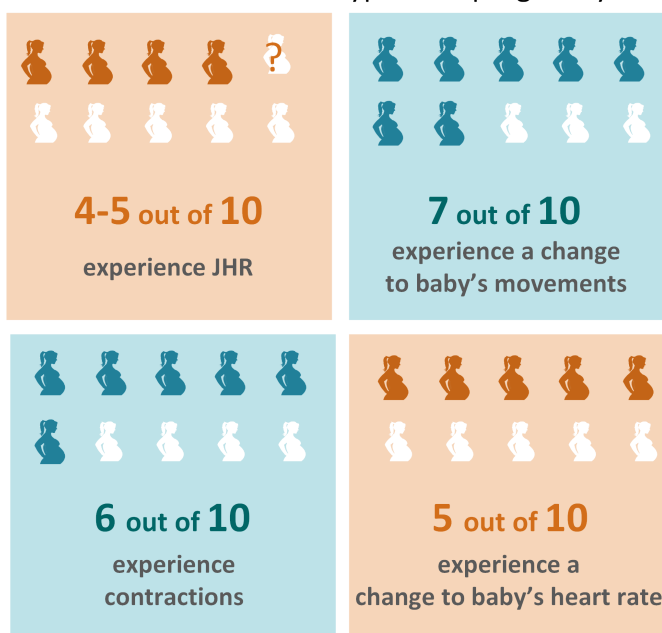
Should you wait until you are not pregnant to have treatment for syphilis?

No, don't delay having treatment for syphilis. It is very important that syphilis is treated as soon as possible during your pregnancy. Syphilis can cause very serious problems for your baby. It can sometimes cause your baby to die.

To learn more about syphilis in pregnancy, you may like to read the parent information called Syphilis in pregnancy.

Women who experience JHR

After treatment for syphilis in pregnancy:



Support & Information

13HEALTH (13 432584) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public.

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline 1800 882 436 (free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care. www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline

Lifeline 13 11 14 Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone. www.lifeline.org.au

Queensland Government provides accurate locations for sexual health services near you www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services

Queensland Clinical Guidelines: Parent information *Syphilis in pregnancy*. www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg