

X-RAYS, CT SCANS, AND OTHER TESTS IN PREGNANCY

Background

Pregnant women often worry that tests like X-rays or CT scans may harm their baby. No single X-ray test or CT scan is dangerous to an unborn child.

How X-ray Tests Affect Pregnancy

Chest X-rays, dental X-rays and mammograms only expose the baby to a tiny amount of radiation. For example, even if a woman has 1,000 chest X-rays or 10 mammograms during her pregnancy, her baby is still safe. An X-ray of the hip or belly also exposes the baby to only a small dose. Even tests that use more radiation, such as a CT scan of the belly, do not increase the risk of birth defects, learning disabilities, or miscarriage.

How Pregnancy Affects X-ray Tests

When X-rays are needed, special care can be taken to lower the baby's exposure. When possible, a lead shield is placed over the uterus. Health care providers may consider using ultrasound or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) tests when evaluating pregnant women, if these will work for your condition. These tests do not use X-rays and do not pose any risk to the baby.

What You Can Do

- 1) *Let your health care provider know that you are or may be pregnant.*
- 2) *Ask whether an ultrasound or MRI is a good alternative to X-ray or CT scan tests.*
- 3) *If you need X-rays, remind the staff to place a shield over your uterus. This should be done unless an X-ray of your belly is needed.*
- 4) *Talk to your doctor, midwife, or other pregnancy care team members if you are worried about the risks to your baby.*



Developed by the WAPC Preconception and Prenatal Care Committee, rev. Oct. 2016

Wisconsin Association for Perinatal Care

211 S. Paterson Street, Suite 250

Madison, WI 53703

Phone: 608-285-5858; Fax: 608-285-5004; Email: wapc@perinatalweb.org; Web:

www.perinatalweb.org

Funded in part by the MCH Title V Services Block Grant, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Perinatal Foundation.