

# RADIATION EMERGENCIES AND PREGNANCY

After a radiation emergency, pregnant women should follow instructions from emergency officials and seek medical attention as soon as emergency officials say it is safe to do so.



Prenatal radiation exposure occurs when a pregnant woman's abdomen is exposed to radiation.

For most radiation exposures, the radiation dose to the fetus is lower than the dose to the woman. A pregnant woman's abdomen partially protects the fetus from radiation sources that are outside her body.

If a pregnant woman swallows or breathes in radioactive materials, these may be absorbed into her bloodstream. From the woman's blood, radioactive materials may pass through the umbilical cord to the fetus or concentrate in areas of the mother's body near the womb and expose the fetus to radiation.

Health effects to the fetus from radiation exposure can be severe, even at radiation doses too low to make the mother sick. These health effects can include miscarriage, stunted growth, deformities, abnormal brain function, and cancer.

A fetus is most sensitive to radiation between weeks 2 and 18 of pregnancy. A fetus will become less sensitive to radiation during later stages of pregnancy.

In the rare event of a radiation emergency, radiation experts can answer questions from pregnant women and their healthcare providers about radiation exposure and pregnancy.



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/radiation>