

Chorioamnionitis

What is Chorioamnionitis?

Chorioamnionitis is an infection of the membrane that surrounds your baby and the amniotic fluid. It is also known as an intra-amniotic infection.

Chorioamnionitis can affect both you and your baby. In the United States, chorioamnionitis occurs in about 1 to 4 percent of births. It is a common cause of preterm labor and delivery.

What Causes Chorioamnionitis?

Chorioamnionitis is most often caused by bacteria commonly found in the vagina. It usually occurs after the bag of waters (amniotic sac) is broken. This lets bacteria in the vagina move up into the uterus.

Who is at Risk for Chorioamnionitis?

You are more likely to have chorioamnionitis if:

- your bag of waters breaks a long time before you deliver your baby
- you have a long labor
- you have vaginal exams often during labor
- this is your first pregnancy
- you have a sexually transmitted infection or other vaginal infection
- you use alcohol or tobacco
- you have internal fetal or uterine monitoring
- you have group B strep.

What are the Symptoms of Chorioamnionitis?

The symptoms of chorioamnionitis include:

- fever
- fast heart rate in mother, baby or both
- tender or painful uterus
- sweating
- foul-smelling amniotic fluid or vaginal discharge.

These symptoms may be a little different for each woman and can sometimes seem like other health problems. There are also some women who have no symptoms at all.

How is Chorioamnionitis Diagnosed?

Your health care provider will examine you and review your symptoms. He or she will also check your baby's heart rate. You may also need a blood test.

How is Chorioamnionitis Treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat chorioamnionitis as soon as the infection is found.

If your bag of waters breaks, your health care provider may recommend that you deliver your baby early, even if you are preterm (less than 37 weeks). This can help prevent complications (problems) for you and your baby.

You may need to keep taking antibiotics after your baby is born.

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If you have chorioamnionitis, your baby will also need testing and treatment. This will usually happen in the special care nursery or neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

What are the Complications of Chorioamnionitis?

In the mother, chorioamnionitis can cause sepsis (a serious blood infection).

In the baby, chorioamnionitis can cause pneumonia (lung infection), meningitis (infection of spinal and brain fluid), brain damage or death.

Can Chorioamnionitis Be Prevented?

To help reduce your risk of chorioamnionitis, you may:

- be given antibiotics if your bag of waters breaks early (premature rupture of membranes)
- have vaginal exams only when needed during labor
- be given medicine to speed up your labor if your bag of waters has broken.

When Should You Call Your Health Care Provider?

Call your health care provider right away if you have any of the following:

- bag of waters ruptures on its own
- a temperature higher than 100.4 F
- fast heart rate (more than 100 beats per minute)
- tender or painful uterus
- foul-smelling amniotic fluid or vaginal discharge.