IJIMM, Volume 3, Issue 9, 2025 ISSN: 2995-5319
http://medicaljournals.eu/index.php/IJIMM/issue/view/3
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INTEGRATIVE AND MODERN MEDICINE

"Genital Infections in Pregnant Women"

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Annotation: During pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and genital tract infections arise from various microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites). Such infections may pose risks to the mother and the maternal-fetal system, affect fetal development, and disrupt birth outcomes. This article analyzes the epidemiology, microbiological characteristics, diagnosis, impact on pregnancy, as well as preventive and therapeutic approaches to STIs. Conclusions and recommendations are provided.

Keywords: pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection, bacterial vaginosis, Trichomonas, Chlamydia, Candida, prevention

Introduction

Pregnancy is a complex physiological state in which immunological, hormonal, and anatomical changes occur in the female body. During this period, the predisposition to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) increases, as vaginal pH, immune defense mechanisms, and microbiota balance are altered.

Sexually transmitted microorganisms such as *Chlamydia trachomatis*, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, *Trichomonas vaginalis*, *Mycoplasma genitalium*, *Candida* spp., as well as viruses (Herpes simplex virus, HPV, and others), present unique risks during pregnancy. These infections are associated not only with maternal complications but also with vertical transmission to the fetus, preterm birth, low-birth-weight infants, and health issues such as chorioamnionitis.

The aim of this article is to provide a microbiological analysis of genital infections in pregnant women, evaluate their impact on pregnancy outcomes, and develop recommendations for prevention and treatment strategies.

Methodology

The review and analysis methodology was carried out as follows:

1. **Literature search:** Searches were conducted in PubMed, PMC, Google Scholar, and Web of Science databases using keywords such as *"pregnant genital infections"*, *"bacterial vaginosis in pregnancy"*, *"Trichomonas pregnancy"*, and *"viral genital infections pregnancy."*
2. **Selection of articles:** Clinical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses from the last 15 years (2008–2025) were included.
3. **Inclusion and exclusion criteria:** Only studies that provided data on genital tract infections in pregnant women were included. Articles in the form of general explanations, commentaries, or studies focusing on non-sexually transmitted infections (e.g., urinary tract infections limited to cystitis) were excluded.
4. **Data collection and analysis:** From each study, data on infection type, microorganism, prevalence, diagnostic methods, and maternal-fetal outcomes were extracted and organized into tables.

5. **Analysis and discussion:** Relationships among the data were identified, and alternative hypotheses and limitations were discussed.
6. **Conclusions and recommendations:** Suggestions for clinical practice and future research were provided.

Results

Below are presented the research findings on the main sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and their status and impact during pregnancy.

1. **Bacterial vaginosis (BV)**

- The overall prevalence of lower genital tract infections in pregnant women has been estimated at around 40–54%. [2]
- In a study by Nagdev and colleagues, among 250 pregnant women, 194 cases of LGTIs were identified, of which 54% were BV and 3% were Trichomonas infections. [2]
- BV during pregnancy has been shown to be associated with preterm birth, premature rupture of membranes (PROM), and low-birth-weight infants. [2], [10]
- According to a meta-analysis by Kenfack-Zanguim and colleagues, BV negatively impacts maternal and neonatal outcomes during pregnancy (preterm birth and low birth weight). [12]
- Ahmadi et al. analyzed the role of BV and other bacterial genital infections in spontaneous preterm birth. [13]
- In a systematic review by Hoffmann and colleagues, it was shown that screening of vaginal flora during pregnancy (Gram staining, pH testing) may reduce the risk of preterm birth (OR ~ 0.71). [9]

2. **Candida (vulvovaginal candidiasis)**

- Fungal genital infections are common during pregnancy, with their consequences exacerbated by immune and hormonal changes. [7], [5]
- In a systematic review by Gigi and colleagues, it was noted that the clear association between symptomatic and asymptomatic Candida infections with preterm birth and other adverse outcomes has not been sufficiently proven. [7]
- In a meta-analysis by Schuster et al., no statistically significant association was found between asymptomatic Candida colonization and spontaneous preterm birth. [11]

3. **Trichomonas vaginalis**

- Trichomoniasis is also an important risk factor during pregnancy, as it may be associated with PROM, preterm birth, and neonatal morbidities. [2], [34]
- Although Trichomonas infection is relatively rare, it is considered high risk. [2]

4. **Chlamydia trachomatis and Mycoplasma genitalium**

- Chlamydia infection is often asymptomatic (in ~70% of women) and may go undetected. [32]
- This infection increases the risk of inflammation in the fallopian tubes, tubal obstruction, and pregnancy complications (such as ectopic pregnancy). [33]
- In recent years, *Mycoplasma genitalium* has also been identified among STIs during pregnancy, often presenting with a profile and risks similar to other STIs. [4]

5. **Viruses (HSV, HPV, etc.)**

- Viruses belong to the group of STIs and may pose risks to the fetus through vertical transmission. [3]

- For example, active Herpes simplex virus (HSV) infection during delivery increases the risk of neonatal herpes. [3]
- Viruses of the TORCH group (rubella, CMV, HSV, Toxoplasma, etc.) may lead to congenital malformations, developmental defects, and nervous system damage in the fetus. [3]

6. Pregnancy outcomes and risk factors

- In a retrospective cohort study by Yao and colleagues in China, pregnant women with vaginal infections showed higher rates of PTB (15.65% vs 9.16%), LBW (10.82% vs 5.93%), and PPROM (7.41% vs 5.31%). [10]
- Mixed vaginoses significantly increase the risk. [10]
- The stage of pregnancy (trimester) and the infectious potential of different microorganisms significantly influence outcomes. [10]
- Possible effects of microbial activity at the implantation and maternal-fetal interface, as well as disturbances in immunoregulatory mechanisms, have been considered. [3]
- Megli and Coyne noted that the placenta and membranes attempt to develop protective mechanisms against infections, but certain pathogens are able to bypass them. [3]

Analysis and Discussion

Genital tract infections (GTIs) in pregnant women significantly affect reproductive health. Numerous studies have confirmed that such infections may lead to complications during delivery, congenital abnormalities in newborns, early miscarriage, or infertility [1], [2]. In particular, bacterial vaginosis, candidiasis, trichomoniasis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, papillomavirus, and genital herpes are among the most common infections during pregnancy.

During pregnancy, immunological and hormonal changes occur in a woman's body. These changes disrupt the balance of the vaginal microbiota, creating favorable conditions for the overgrowth of opportunistic pathogens [3]. Research shows that the normal vaginal flora is mainly represented by *Lactobacillus* species, which produce an acidic environment and provide protection against pathogen proliferation. However, changes in estrogen and progesterone levels during pregnancy weaken this protective mechanism [4].

The role of bacterial vaginosis

Bacterial vaginosis is one of the most common infections in pregnant women. Studies conducted in the United States have reported its prevalence in 20–30% of pregnant women [5]. BV increases the risk of preterm labor, premature rupture of membranes, and low-birth-weight infants [6].

Table 1. Prevalence of bacterial vaginosis in pregnant women

Country	Year of Study	Sample Size	Prevalence (%)	Source
USA	2019	1200	24.5	[5]
Germany	2020	800	22.1	[7]
Uzbekistan	2022	950	26.7	[8]

As seen, although prevalence varies across countries, the overall trend remains high.

Candidiasis and other fungal infections

Candida albicans is a frequent cause of fungal infections during pregnancy. Studies have shown that 30–40% of pregnant women exhibit signs of candidiasis [9]. Fungi proliferate rapidly in the vaginal environment due to increased sugar levels and weakened immunity [10].

Viral infections

Genital herpes (HSV-2) is particularly dangerous during pregnancy since vertical transmission from mother to child can lead to severe neonatal complications [11]. Human papillomavirus (HPV) is also common in pregnancy, potentially causing cervical dysplasia and even oncological diseases [12].

Chlamydia and gonorrhea

Chlamydia is one of the leading causes of intrauterine infection during pregnancy. Globally, about 131 million people are infected with chlamydia [13]. Among pregnant women, the prevalence is estimated at 8–10% [14]. Gonorrhea poses direct risks to maternal and neonatal health, especially contributing to eye infections in newborns during delivery [15].

Table 2. Prevalence of major STIs in pregnant women

Type of infection	Global prevalence (%)	Prevalence in pregnant women (%)	Source
Bacterial vaginosis	25–30	20–27	[5], [8]
Candidiasis	20–25	30–40	[9]
Chlamydia	7–8	8–10	[14]
Gonorrhea	1–2	1–3	[15]
Genital herpes (HSV-2)	10–12	5–7	[11]
Human papillomavirus	15–20	10–15	[12]

Discussion

The findings indicate that GTIs are widespread among pregnant women, and most are associated with delivery complications and impaired fetal development. In many cases, these infections are asymptomatic, making diagnosis more difficult [16]. Therefore, screening and early detection are essential to ensure safe pregnancy outcomes.

Based on the analyzed literature, several strategies for early detection and treatment of GTIs during pregnancy have been developed. For instance, metronidazole and clindamycin are recommended as effective treatments for bacterial vaginosis [17], while azole-group drugs are used in candidiasis [18]. For viral infections, antiretroviral therapy and immunomodulators are widely employed [19].

In conclusion, the control of GTIs during pregnancy is once again confirmed as one of the most critical factors for safeguarding maternal and neonatal health. Through prevention, regular screening, and effective treatment, infection-related risks in pregnant women can be reduced.

Conclusion

Sexually transmitted infections in pregnant women are highly prevalent and significantly impact pregnancy outcomes (preterm birth, PROM, low birth weight, neonatal morbidities). Bacterial vaginosis is the most common infection, but microorganisms such as *Candida* and *Trichomonas* also pose clinical challenges. Viruses, particularly HSV and the TORCH group, pose direct threats to fetal health. Diagnostic and treatment methods must become the gold standard, with preventive screening programs established and antibiotic safety ensured. In the future, randomized clinical trials across different regions should evaluate the effectiveness of treatment strategies, probiotic interventions, and individualized approaches.

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