



If a woman living with HIV tells me they are pregnant, I am required to contact child protection services (i.e., Children's Aid Society) because the child may be at risk.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is pregnancy for women living with HIV a child protection concern?
- What is my legal obligation to report child protection concerns?
- What knowledge, experiences, and attitudes might influence how and why HIV is viewed as a child protection concern?
- What policies, professional guidelines, or laws exist that may assist in this scenario?
- How can you as an individual worker and as an organization effectively support women living with HIV who are pregnant or new mothers?



MYTH

TIPS:

Community workers may be in a position where they are supporting women who are pregnant and are living with HIV. There are many considerations in this situation and also many ways to provide support to help ensure the well-being of both the woman and the fetus. Having supports in place can be one helpful way to support the woman; however, it is also important to build trust by respecting her rights to privacy. While we are all required to contact child protection services when a child is in need of protection, HIV status in and of itself does not constitute a child protection concern.

Here is some information that may be helpful as you navigate this situation:


- Being pregnant or parenting while HIV-positive does not constitute abuse or neglect, and therefore does not require a worker to contact child protective services.
- Significant medical advancements have contributed to the evolution of HIV infection into a chronic health condition that can be effectively managed with treatment. Pregnancy and parenthood are increasingly normalized for women living with HIV who can expect a life expectancy that is similar to women who do not have HIV. There are medical procedures, treatments, and practices that women are recommended to follow during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum to reduce the chance of HIV transmission to their fetus or baby. Women living with HIV are typically connected to HIV and maternity care specialists, understand what steps are needed to reduce the chance of HIV transmission to their baby, and have similar pregnancies to other women who do not have HIV. However, many women living with HIV also fear being reported to child protection services and fear facing stigma and discrimination because of their HIV-positive status and misconceptions regarding HIV transmission and possible “risks” to their baby. It is important to know that a woman’s HIV status and their experiences of HIV-related stigma may influence how they engage with health and social services, as well as what information they disclose. For



example, some women may not disclose that they are pregnant or that they are living with HIV because of the fear of a referral to child protection services. You can help to reduce fear by talking about your role, offering support, and talking through confidentiality and privacy policies.

- You can be of assistance to pregnant or parenting women by being supportive of their needs, listening to them about their worries and fears, and sharing up-to-date research, information, and resources. It is also important to talk about any experiences of stigma, discrimination, or judgment they may be experiencing. You can support women accessing other programs and services which they may not be connected to, such as health care services. You can also help to ensure women are connected to culturally relevant supports, and support them to integrate these into their care. In addition, you can work collaboratively with their health and social care team to support them during pregnancy and postpartum. You can also be supportive by talking openly about confidentiality guidelines as it relates to their HIV status so that they feel supported and can make informed choices.
- If you have concerns about a woman's pregnancy, discuss your concerns and actively work with the woman to problem-solve and remedy the identified concerns. Work from a perspective that supports her strengths, and collaboratively problem solve any concern areas.
- If you believe a child is in need of protection for any reason and a call to child protection services is needed, it is helpful and respectful to discuss your concerns with the woman if possible. You are not required to disclose their HIV status in your correspondence with child protection authorities. Refer to the *Personal Health Information and Protection Act* for more information about the collection, use, and disclosure of health information.



Check out the  **More Information** section of this toolkit for additional resources about pregnancy and parenting in the context of HIV.



For more information visit **WHAI.CA**