

# Plain Language Glossary of Preconception/Interconception Health Terms

Healthy Start Community Health Worker Course



**Abnormal/abnormality:** Not normal or usual.

**Abstinence:** Abstinence means not having sex. For some people, not having sex is the best way to prevent a pregnancy. Abstinence is also very effective at preventing HIV and other STDs. (See HIV, STDs).

**Affordable Care Act:** Health reform law which extends health coverage to uninsured Americans and include measures to reduce the burden of healthcare costs.

**Asthma:** Disease when a person's airways become swollen, making it difficult to breath.

**Birth defects:** A physical or biochemical abnormality that is present at birth and may be caused by genetics or environmental influences.

**Birth outcomes:** The results or outcomes of pregnancy. Good birth outcomes include full-term, healthy, normal birthweight babies. Poor birth outcomes include preterm birth, low birthweight babies, birth defects and infant mortality.

**BMI:** Stands for "body mass index". Is a measure of body fat based on your weight in relation to your height.

**Complications of pregnancy:** Health problems which occur during pregnancy and may involve the mother's health, the baby's health or both. Complications can arise during pregnancy, or as a result of health problems prior to conception.

**Conception:** The joining of an egg and a sperm to start a pregnancy. Also called "fertilization".

**Congenital:** Something that you are born with.

**Contraception/contraceptive:** Methods for preventing pregnancy. Also called "birth control".

**Depression:** A mood disorder which causes persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest in daily activities and things you used to enjoy.

**Diabetes:** A disease in which your blood glucose, or blood sugar, levels are too high. Glucose comes from the foods you eat. Insulin is a hormone that helps the glucose get into your cells to give them energy. With type 1 diabetes, your body does not make insulin. With type 2 diabetes, the more common type, your body does not make or use insulin well. Gestational diabetes starts during pregnancy in some women, due to the effect of pregnancy hormones. Women with diabetes may have more difficult pregnancies with a higher risk of complications.

**Embryo:** Unborn, developing baby, up to the third month of pregnancy.

**Epilepsy:** Chronic disease which causes seizures. Can be from a genetic disorder or a brain injury.

**Family planning:** Making decisions and plans about whether and when to have children, and using birth control to help you carry out your plans.

**Fertility:** For women, the ability to get pregnant and give birth to a child. For men, the ability to cause a pregnancy in a female sex partner.

**Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD):** Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders is a term describing the range of effects that can occur in child whose mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. These effects can include physical, mental, behavioral and learning disabilities and problems that last for life.

**Fetus/Fetal:** Unborn, developing baby, from the third month of pregnancy to birth.

**Folic acid:** Vitamin that helps the body make healthy new cells. It is very important for women to get the recommended 400 microgram dose every day, before and during pregnancy to help prevent birth defects of the baby's brain and spinal cord.

**Glucose tolerance test:** Blood and urine test to measure a woman's response to drinking a sugary drink in order to check for gestational diabetes.

**Health care provider:** A professional who provides preventative, curative, promotional or rehabilitative health care services. Can be anyone provides health care services including physicians, dentists, nurses, social workers, therapists, etc.

**High-risk:** Involving or exposed to a high level of danger.

**HIV:** HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV weakens a person's ability to fight infections and cancer. HIV can be passed to another person through sex or through sharing needles for drug use. Mothers can also pass it to their babies at birth or through breastfeeding. A person may have HIV without knowing it until they get HIV testing.

**Hypertension:** High blood pressure

**Immunizations:** Shots (vaccinations) given to protect people against serious diseases, such as measles, tetanus and flu. There are recommended immunization schedules for babies, children, teens and adults. An important reason to well-woman and well-child visits is to receive recommended immunizations.

**Infant mortality:** The death of a child under the age of 1 year.

**Interconception:** The time between the end of one pregnancy and the beginning of the next one.

**Interconception Care:** Similar to preconception care, but provided to women (and men) between pregnancies. See "preconception care".

**Intervene/intervention:** Intervene means getting involved to prevent something from happening, or solve a problem. A medical treatment or preventive measure.

**Intimate Partner Violence:** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is physical, sexual or psychological harm caused by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. Also called “domestic violence”.

**Lactation:** The secretion of milk from the breasts to feed a baby. Also known as breastfeeding or nursing.

**Low birthweight:** Term used to describe a baby born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces. Babies with low birthweight may be at increased risk for health problems or developmental delays.

**Maternal mortality:** The death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days after the end of a pregnancy, from any cause related to or caused by the pregnancy or its management, and not by accidental causes.

**Medical home:** Having a usual source of medical care, a regular doctor or clinic that woman and her children go to. A “patient-centered medical home” is team-based approach to health care delivery which provides comprehensive and patient-centered medical care to patients, to keep people as healthy as possible.

**Medications:** Medicine used for medical treatment, often to treat diseases or relieve pain. Some medications are prescription medications (ordered by a doctor), while others are “over-the-counter”, meaning you can get them at the pharmacy without a prescription.

**Menopause:** The time in a woman’s life when she stops having her periods and can no longer get pregnant (usually starts between age 45 and 55).

**Miscarriage:** A condition in which the pregnancy ends too early and does not result in the birth of a live baby. Also known as “spontaneous abortion”.

**Neonatal abstinence syndrome:** A group of problems which occur in a newborn who was exposed to addictive opiate drugs in the mother’s womb before birth.

**Neonatal withdrawal:** Babies whose mothers use addictive drugs during pregnancy, can become dependent on the drug and as a result may experience withdrawal symptoms after birth.

**Neural tube defects:** Birth defects of the brain, spine, or spinal cord. The most common forms are spina bifida and anencephaly. It is recommended that women take folic acid before and during pregnancy to help prevent neural tube defects.

**Nutrition:** Taking in food and using it for growth, energy and repair. Good nutrition, including eating lots of fruits and vegetables and maintaining a healthy weight, is important for a healthy pregnancy.

**Obesity:** Condition of being overweight.

**Percent effective:** This is a way of saying how good a birth control method is at preventing pregnancy. "Percent effective" means if 100 people use a birth control method correctly, what percent (how many out of 100) will not get pregnant after using it for a year. For example: If used correctly, the birth control pill is 99.9% effective. This means that of 1000 women, almost all of them (999 women) will not get pregnant.

**Perinatal:** Period of time before and after childbirth, particularly the five months before and one month after birth.

**Physical anomalies:** Congenital physical abnormalities or defects.

**Planned pregnancy:** Intended pregnancy

**Postpartum:** Period of time after childbirth, from birth to the child is 6 months old.

**Postpartum Care/Visit:** Postpartum care focuses on a woman after giving birth to make sure that her body is healing well after pregnancy. At about 6 weeks after giving birth, women should have a postpartum visit with a healthcare provider to assess how well she is recovering from the delivery, check for postpartum depression, provide

birth control, talk about breastfeeding and any other concerns she may have.

**Preconception:** Period before a woman becomes pregnant.

**Preconception Care:** Medical care and preventive activities for women and men that focus on the parts of health that have been shown to increase the chance of having a healthy baby. Preconception care aims to improve people's health before by promoting good nutrition and exercise, addressing alcohol, tobacco and drug use, and treating chronic diseases.

**Preconception health:** A woman's health before she becomes pregnant. Can also refer to a man's health before he fathers a child.

**Pregnancy:** When a woman is expecting a baby.

**Prenatal:** During pregnancy, before birth.

**Prenatal Care/Visit:** Health care received during pregnancy to make sure both the mother and developing baby are healthy, and that the baby is developing normally. The recommended schedule of prenatal visits for a normal pregnancy is: weeks 4 to 28: 1 prenatal visit a month, weeks 28 to 36: 1 prenatal visit every 2 weeks, and weeks 36 to 40: 1 prenatal visit every week.

**Preterm labor:** When a woman starts going into labor too early in pregnancy, before 37 weeks.

**Preterm birth:** Birth that occurs before the 37<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. A normal pregnancy lasts around 40 weeks. Preterm babies—babies born too early—can have serious health problems and may need additional care, medications or surgery.

**Prevent/prevention:** To stop something from happening. Preventive care is given to help keep people well.

**Puberty:** Period of time which adolescents reach sexual maturity and become capable of starting a pregnancy.

**Referral:** Sending someone (setting up an appointment) to a doctor or other health care provider, or to another service such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, or social services.

**Reproductive Life Plan:** A personal plan for whether, when, and how to have children. It includes personal goals, and states how to achieve them.

**Risk factor:** Something that increases the risk or likelihood of developing a disease or illness.

**Screening:** Test to detect those with high probability of having or developing a disease or condition. Test to look for early signs of illness, before you have any symptoms.

**Sickle Cell Anemia:** Genetic disease that affects red blood cells, causing them to change shape and block small blood vessels, limiting blood flow and causing pain and anemia (not enough oxygen in your blood).

**Spontaneous abortion:** Unexpected loss of a pregnancy before the 20th week. Also known as a miscarriage.

**STI/STD:** STI stands for “sexually transmitted infections”. STIs are also called STDs which stands for “sexually transmitted diseases”. STIs/STDs are diseases passed to people through sex. Using a condom helps to prevent STIs/STDs.

**Stillbirth:** Loss of a pregnancy after the 20th week of pregnancy.

**Teratogenic:** Something that causes defects in a developing fetus.

**Unplanned pregnancy:** A pregnancy that is mistimed, unplanned or unwanted at time of conception.

**Unprotected sex:** Having sex without using birth control, or without using a condom. Having unprotected sex increases your chances of becoming pregnant and of getting HIV or STDs.



**Well woman visit:** An exam for women to review their overall health and their reproductive health. Well-woman visits are recommended annually and include breast and pelvic examinations and a pap smear.

**Women of reproductive age:** Women between the ages of 15-49 years.

### **Table 1: Contraceptive (Birth Control) Methods Defined**

**Diaphragm:** A flexible, round rubber cup that covers the woman's cervix (the opening to the uterus). You put spermicide in the diaphragm, and then put it in the vagina before having sex. You must leave the diaphragm in for at least 6 hours after sex. A doctor or nurse must examine you to be sure you get the right size diaphragm.

**Female condom:** A plastic pouch with a flexible ring at each end. The closed end is put into the vagina. The open end stays just outside the vagina. The female condom keeps sperm from entering the vagina.

**Fertility awareness methods:** A doctor or nurse teaches you to keep track of the monthly changes in your menstrual cycle, so that you can understand which days you are most likely to get pregnant. You and your partner can then prevent pregnancy by using a barrier method of birth control or not having sex on the days you are most likely to get pregnant. When you and your partner decide you want a child, you can also use fertility awareness to plan the best days to get pregnant.

**Injectables:** Birth control that is injected (given as a shot) every three months.

**Implants:** A doctor or nurse places a small rod under your skin (usually in your arm). The rod releases hormones to prevent pregnancy for up to 3 years.

**IUD:** IUD stands for **I**ntra**u**terine **D**evice. It is a small device made of plastic or metal that is put inside a woman's uterus by a doctor or

nurse. An IUD is effective at preventing pregnancy for 5 - 10 years, depending on the type.

**Male condom:** A condom is a thin latex or plastic cover that is rolled onto the erect (hard) penis before sex to keep sperm from entering the vagina. Also called a "rubber".

**Oral contraceptives:** Birth control pills. Birth control pills contain hormones that prevent pregnancy. You must take a pill every day. When you get to the end of your pack of pills you must start to take pills from a new pack exactly as directed by your doctor or nurse. A doctor or nurse must give you a prescription for birth control pills.

**Patch:** The contraceptive patch contains hormones that prevent pregnancy. You stick a patch to your skin and change it once a week for 3 weeks. The 4th week you do not use a patch and your period will start. At the end of the 4th week you put on a new patch, and start the process over again. A doctor or nurse must give you a prescription for the patch.

**Spermicide:** A sperm-killing agent, usually a cream or jelly that is inserted into the vagina before sex to help prevent pregnancy.

**Vaginal ring:** This clear, flexible ring contains hormones that prevent pregnancy. You put it into your vagina and leave it in for 3 weeks. On the 4th week you take out the ring and your period will start. At the end of the 4th week you put in a new ring, and start the process over again. A doctor or nurse must give you a prescription for the ring.

**Vasectomy:** An operation done by a doctor. The man's tubes that carry sperm are cut or blocked, so that sperm is not released during sex.