

PATIENT INFORMATION

Botulinum Toxin Injections for Strabismus (Squint) in Pregnancy

Botulinum toxin injections for Strabismus (Squint) during pregnancy and breastfeeding- FAQ's

This leaflet relates specifically to frequently asked questions patients may have about the use of botulinum toxin during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and is meant to supplement the general leaflet already available about botulinum toxin for squint.

Has botulinum toxin previously been given to pregnant women?

Yes. There are published reports of botulinum toxin being given to pregnant women to treat a range of conditions, including squint.

What dose of toxin was used?

The dose of botulinum toxin given for various symptoms of squint ranged from 1.25 to 400 units. The dose we use to treat squints at Torbay is 2.5 units in both pregnant and non-pregnant women.

Were there any problems reported in the pregnancy of women who had toxin injections?

There are no large studies of women who used botulinum toxin during pregnancy, and so there is not enough information to accurately assess the safety of botulinum toxin use in pregnant women. Published medical studies so far have shown no additional risk in pregnancy in those who received botulinum toxin compared to that of the general population.

A baby's body and most internal organs are formed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. It is mainly during this time that some medicines are known to cause birth defects. Treatment with botulinum toxin during the first trimester has been described in around 170 pregnancies. Although there is currently no proof that exposure to botulinum toxin causes birth defects, because such a small number of pregnancies have been studied, much more information needs to be collected before this can be confirmed.

No studies have assessed the chance of learning and behavioural problems in children whose mothers used botulinum toxin during pregnancy.

Is it medically safe to have botulinum toxin while breastfeeding?

There is no published information about the medical use of botulinum toxin in breastfeeding. There is one published case report of a woman with botulism (a very rare but life-threatening condition caused by toxins produced by bacteria) who safely breastfed her infant and no botulinum toxin was found in her milk. However, we know botulinum toxin has been found in the breast milk of animals with botulism.

Have there been any harmful effects of botulinum toxin reported during pregnancy in animals?

Yes. In experimental studies using rabbits, daily injections led to maternal toxicity, miscarriage and foetal abnormalities.

What is our advice on this?

Medically, we would suggest that no medication, unless it is absolutely necessary, should be given during pregnancy or breast feeding. Although the current limited evidence available would suggest there have been no harmful effects in humans, safety cannot be completely guaranteed; there is the potential risk of miscarriage or abnormalities in the baby, or botulism if breastfeeding. When deciding whether or not to use botulinum toxin during pregnancy it is important to weigh up how important its use is to your health against the known or possible risks to you and your baby. If treatment is not absolutely necessary, it would usually be advisable to postpone treatment until you have given birth or weaned your child.

What should I do if I wish to proceed with the botulinum toxin injection?

You will need to inform your doctor and sign a new consent form to confirm you have read this information, are aware of and understand the potential risks and wish to proceed with the injection. If you are breastfeeding, we strongly advise that you express your milk to use for 24-48 hours following the injection.

Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.