

## What You Should Know About ...

See Glossary section for definitions of underlined words.

# Sexual Reproduction

### How does the reproductive system work?

1. Every month a woman's body gets ready to get pregnant. An egg (ovum) from one of the ovaries starts to mature. The lining of the uterus thickens.
2. When the egg is ripe, it bursts out of the ovary. This is called ovulation. The egg travels up the fallopian tube toward the uterus.
3. This is the time when a woman is "fertile" (when she could get pregnant).
4. When the man ejaculates during intercourse, millions of sperm are released in the vagina.
5. If a sperm joins with the egg, the egg is called a "fertilized egg".
6. The fertilized egg then travels down the tube to the uterus and attaches itself to the wall of the uterus.
7. The fertilized egg will need the thick lining of the uterus for nourishment (food) and will start to grow into an embryo, then a fetus.
8. A baby is ready to be born 40 weeks from the last menstrual period.
9. If the egg is not fertilized, the thick lining of the uterus is not needed. The body gets rid of this lining. It passes out through the cervix and then the vagina. This is called menstruation or "having your period".

### How does a woman know when she's fertile?

During the "fertile" time, a woman may notice that her vaginal discharge is clear and slippery. This mucus helps sperm travel up into the uterus. A woman may not be aware of when she is fertile.

### Does the man have to ejaculate for the woman to get pregnant?

Even before ejaculation, when the penis gets erect (hard), the small amount of wetness on the tip of the penis contains thousands of sperm. This small amount is enough to get a woman pregnant. This is called pre-ejaculatory fluid or pre "cum".

### Is there a safe time to have sex and not get pregnant?

- Sperm can remain in a woman's body for several days after sexual intercourse. Even if you do not have intercourse during the "fertile time" there can still be sperm present to fertilize the egg.
- Not all women have the same cycle. They may not know when they are ovulating and some women ovulate more than once in each month. So, there is never a safe time to have sex if you don't want to get pregnant. Use birth control.

### Does a woman have to have sex or have a baby if she doesn't want to?

No. Find out about REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL RIGHTS and birth control.

### Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse.
- From the Facts of Life On-Line: e-mail your questions to [thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca](mailto:thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca).

## **Glossary:**

**Birth Control** – The different ways of preventing pregnancy.

**Cervix** – The lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. It is also called the “neck of the uterus”.

**Discharge** – The release of any substance from anywhere on the body.

**Ejaculate/Ejaculation** – The release of semen from the penis. “Ejaculate” is also known as “come” or “cum” (street language).

**Embryo** – A word for the early stage of development of a baby, from the time of conception to the end of the second month of pregnancy.

**Fallopian Tube** – Two tubes, one leading from each ovary, to the uterus. This is where an ovum (egg cell) may be fertilized by a sperm cell.

**Menstruation** – The “monthly” discharge of blood from the uterus in females after puberty. Also known as a woman’s “period”.

**Ovaries** – The female organs that store and release egg cells and produce the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

**Ovulation** – The release of an egg (ovum) from an ovary.

**Penis** – The external male sex organ, used for urination (peeing) and sexual intercourse.

**Semen** – The white fluid that comes out of the penis when a man ejaculates.

**Sperm** – The male reproductive cell; carried out of the penis in the semen during ejaculation.

**Uterus** – A pear-shaped, hollow organ with muscular walls. The fetus grows in the uterus. The uterus is also called the “womb”.

**Vagina** – The muscular tube inside a woman’s body where the menstrual blood comes out from the uterus, where a baby comes out from the uterus during childbirth, and where a penis can go in for vaginal intercourse.