

IS VACCINATION INDMICAL TO PREGNANCY?

The protection against variola which vaccination affords is now generally recognized, and the question is often asked, Is it prudent to vaccinate pregnant women? Some persons seem to entertain the apprehension that pregnant women incur special and serious risks under vaccination. To justify exceptional neglect of vaccination in their case, it ought to be shown, not only what this special risk is, but also that it is more serious than the risk incurred by the women themselves taking the smallpox, and thus of propagating the disease to others. The community as well as the pregnant women should be considered.

To make out, then, a case for special exemption, it ought to be shown that the pregnant woman incurs a particular danger. Where is the evidence of this? Very likely the following, from Dr. Meigs' work on Diseases of Females, will be cited as authoritative in this matter. "Do not," he says, "vaccinate women when pregnant. I have been the witness of dreadful distress from the operation. Eschew it, I entreat you." It would be very desirable to have the cases justifying this very emphatic assertion recorded. We fear there is some confusion in the matter. When asking for evidences of mischief, as of abortion, from vaccination, we have been told of abortion and serious illness following smallpox. We do not doubt that smallpox is a most serious accident to a pregnant woman. Variola is a most serious disease at any time, but the puerperal state fearfully augments the risk: does it not follow, *a fortiori*, that pregnant women should be protected against smallpox?

Our own experience has supplied us with many illustrations, which we think warrant us in asserting that pregnant women living under epidemic or zymotic influences are more prone to take the prevalent morbid poisons than others, and that, having taken a morbid poison, they are less able to throw it off. Their excreting organs, charged with the double duty of excreting for two organisms, are liable to break down under the additional burden. The morbid poison pursues its course in a system which

is less able to resist its injurious action; abortion, and a most dangerous form of puerperal fever, are very likely to follow.

Against this certainly greater risk of taking smallpox, and certainly greater severity of the disease, if taken, what, we ask again, is the special danger of vaccination or re-vaccination? The operation, we know, is not altogether free from danger in adults of either sex. Before resorting to it, it is wise to get the system into good condition. Do pregnant women run more risk than other adults? Probably they are at some disadvantage. But we believe that the special dread of abortion is exaggerated, if not altogether unfounded. The healthy ovum clings to a healthy uterus with a wonderful tenacity. An ordinary illness, much less the slight febrile disturbance of vaccination, will not affect this relation. On the other hand, slighter causes may precipitate an abortion already imminent.

So far is vaccination from causing abortion, that cases are known in which the fetus has gone safely through the vaccine disease *in utero*, so that it has subsequently been proof against vaccination. We think, then, we may conclude that in the absence of decisive evidence of special danger that pregnant women are entitled to equal protection against smallpox with the rest of the community; and that vaccination and re-vaccination should be practiced on pregnant women in their own interest as well as that of the community of which they form a part.—*Massachusetts Medical Journal*.