28. What should be done if a woman using a copper-bearing IUD is found to be pregnant?

Copper-bearing IUD user is found to be pregnant
♦ Exclude ectopic pregnancy.
♦ Explain that she is at an increased risk of first and second trimester miscarriage (including septic miscarriage that may be life-threatening) and of pre-term delivery if the IUD is left in place. The removal of the copper-bearing IUD reduces these risks, although the procedure itself entails a small risk of miscarriage.
◊ If she does not want to continue the pregnancy and if therapeutic termination of pregnancy is legally available, inform her accordingly.
◊ If she wishes to continue the pregnancy, make clear to her the increased risks of first and second trimester miscarriage (including septic miscarriage that may be life-threatening) and of pre-term delivery if the copper-bearing IUD is left in place. Advise her to seek care promptly if she has heavy bleeding, cramping, pain, abnormal vaginal discharge, or fever.

The IUD strings are visible or can be retrieved safely from the cervical canal
♦ Advise her that it is best to remove the copper-bearing IUD.
♦ If the copper-bearing IUD is to be removed, remove it by pulling on the strings gently.
♦ Explain that she should return promptly if she has heavy bleeding, cramping, pain, abnormal vaginal discharge, or fever.
♦ If she chooses to keep the copper-bearing IUD, advise her to seek care promptly if she has heavy bleeding, cramping, pain, abnormal vaginal discharge, or fever.

The IUD strings are not visible and cannot be safely retrieved
♦ Where ultrasound is available, it may be useful in determining the location of the copper-bearing IUD. If the copper-bearing IUD is not located, this may suggest that an expulsion of the copper-bearing IUD has occurred.
♦ If ultrasound is not possible or if the copper-bearing IUD is determined by ultrasound to be inside the uterus, make clear the risks and advise her to seek care promptly if she has heavy bleeding, cramping, pain, abnormal vaginal discharge, or fever.

Comments
The expert Working Group concluded that removing the copper-bearing IUD improves pregnancy outcome if the IUD strings are visible or can be retrieved safely from the cervical canal, and that the risks of miscarriage, pre-term delivery and infection are substantial if the copper-bearing IUD is left in place.
Systematic review question
What are the risks of adverse events if the copper-bearing IUD is removed or kept in place?
Level of evidence: II-2, fair, direct.

References from systematic review

Key unresolved issues
What are the pregnancy outcomes for women who become pregnant with a copper-bearing IUD in place and how do these outcomes differ between women who do and do not have the copper-bearing IUD removed?