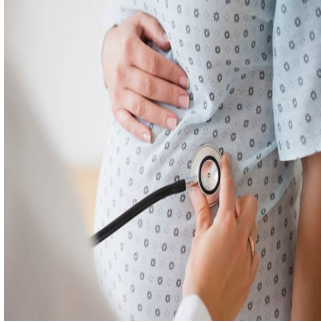


## Prescription Painkillers Double Birth Defects Risk



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According to a new analysis published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, more than one-fourth of privately insured and one-third of Medicaid enrolled women of childbearing age filled prescriptions for narcotic painkillers between 2008-2012.

Prescription narcotic painkillers such as codeine, oxycodone, hydrocodone or morphine can increase the risk of serious birth defects of the baby's brain, spine and heart. They can also result in a preterm birth if taken during a pregnancy. In addition, opioid-based painkillers can cause babies to suffer from neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).

Approximately half of all pregnancies are unplanned and thus women are often prescribed opioid-based painkillers before they or their health care providers become aware they are pregnant. Keeping this in mind, Coleen A. Boyle, PhD, MSHyg, Director of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities highlights the importance of promoting safer treatment options in women of reproductive age. She stresses that there is a need to protect babies from exposure to narcotics.

José F. Cordero, MD, MPH, a paediatrician, birth defects expert states, ""If you are using an opioid pain killer, you should also be practicing effective birth control. If you decide to get pregnant or do become pregnant, tell your health care provider about all the medications you are taking right away. You may be able to switch to a safer alternative."

Statistics show that in the US, a baby is born with a birth defect every four and a half minutes. Moreover, one out of every five deaths in the first year of a child's life is caused by a birth defect. Birth defects related hospital costs are more than \$2.6 billion annually. Dr. Cordero urges physicians not to prescribe opioid-based painkillers to female patients who may become pregnant without discussing the risks associated with these drugs as well as alternative treatments.

The CDC has taken a new initiative "Treating for Two: Safer Medication Use in Pregnancy" that aims to prevent birth defects and offers information to women and their healthcare providers about the appropriate use of medication during pregnancy and best treatment options for conditions that are common during pregnancy and childbearing years.

Source: [MarchofDimes.org](http://MarchofDimes.org)

Image Credit: abcnews.com

Published on : Thu, 29 Jan 2015