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## Antidepressants could complicate pregnancy, studies say

Two new studies suggest that taking antidepressants during the first trimester of pregnancy may slightly increase the risk of some rare birth defects.

By  [Maura Lerner](#), Star Tribune

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Two new studies suggest that taking antidepressants during the first trimester of pregnancy may slightly increase the risk of some rare birth defects.

But the studies, published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine, found that the overall risks are quite small. And scientists cautioned women against stopping treatment, saying that untreated depression can be even more of a danger to their offspring.

"Overall, our results are generally reassuring with respect to the use of antidepressants during pregnancy," said Jennita Reefhuis, one of the authors, and an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.


The studies were designed to find out if a class of drugs, known as SSRIs (selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors) posed a risk to developing fetuses early in pregnancy. They were prompted, in part, by a 2005 study suggesting that Paxil increased the rate of heart defects from about 1 percent to 2 percent.

The two studies showed no such increase in heart defects, based on reviews of thousands of infants exposed to antidepressants in the womb. But one study found slight increases in three other types of birth defects, affecting development of the skull, brain and intestines. The other study found that certain drugs were associated with a small rise in heart and intestinal problems.

Dr. Michael Greene, a Boston specialist in maternal and fetal medicine, wrote in an accompanying editorial that the two reports, while slightly contradictory, "do suggest that any increased risks...are likely to be small."

Experts say that every pregnancy carries about a 3 percent chance of serious birth defects. About 10 percent of women experience depression during pregnancy, according to one of the studies.

"We know that both the mother and baby benefit when a pregnant woman with a serious depressive illness is able to stay on some sort of treatment," said Reefhuis, of the CDC. She said the risks may vary from drug to drug, and that women should talk with their doctors about the risks and benefits of treatment.

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