



Reduce The Risk Of Birth Defects: Avoid Opioids When Possible

(NAPSA)—Every 4½ minutes in the U.S., a baby is born with a birth defect leading to hospital-related economic costs that exceed \$2.6 billion annually—but the risk of birth defects can be decreased.

The Problem

Many women are unaware that prescription opioid-based medications such as codeine, oxycodone, hydrocodone and morphine, used to treat severe pain, may increase the risk for serious birth defects of the brain, spine, abdominal wall and heart, as well as preterm birth when taken during pregnancy. They can also cause babies to suffer withdrawal when born.

Since half of all pregnancies are unplanned, women may be prescribed opioid-based pain medications before they know they're pregnant. In fact, more than one-fourth of privately insured women of childbearing age fill prescriptions for opioid-based painkillers, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Expert Opinions

“This highlights the importance of promoting safer alternative treatments, when available, for women of reproductive age. We must do what we can to protect babies from exposure to opioids,” said Coleen A. Boyle, Ph.D., MSHyg, Director of CDC’s National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

“If you are using an opioid painkiller, you should also be practicing effective birth control,” advised José F. Cordero, M.D., MPH, a pediatrician, birth defects expert formerly at CDC, and member of the Board of Trustees at the March of Dimes, the leading nonprofit organization for pregnancy and baby health. “If you decide to get pregnant or do



By not taking certain prescription painkillers, mothers may protect their babies from birth defects.

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,” he went on to say.

Dr. Cordero also urged physicians and other prescribers not to write prescriptions for opioid-based painkillers for their female patients who may become pregnant without a discussion of the risks and safer alternatives.

“The CDC’s Treating for Two: Safer Medication Use in Pregnancy initiative offers information to women and their health care providers about medication use during pregnancy. This initiative aims to prevent birth defects and improve the health of mothers and babies by working to identify the best alternatives for treatment of common conditions during pregnancy and during the childbearing years,” added Dr. Boyle.

Learn More

Further information is at www.cdc.gov/treatingfortwo, www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/meds/treatingfortwo/features/opioid.html, www.marchofdimes.org and www.nacersano.org.