

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Cannabis Use Disorder in Pregnancy Linked to Infant Health Problems

A new study of nearly five million live births recorded in California from 2001 to 2012 found that babies born to mothers diagnosed with cannabis use disorders at delivery were more likely to experience negative health outcomes, including preterm birth and low birth weight, compared to babies born to mothers without a cannabis use disorder diagnosis. The study, published today funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health, adds to a growing body of evidence that prenatal exposure to cannabis (marijuana) may be associated with poor birth outcomes, and sheds light on infant health one year after birth.

Recent studies have shown the use of cannabis during pregnancy is rising, with some expectant parents reporting using the drug to alleviate nausea and vomiting associated with pregnancy. Medical experts have expressed concern around these patterns because an active component of cannabis, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), has been shown to reach fetuses and infants through the placenta and breastmilk, respectively. Further, THC disrupts the normal function of the endocannabinoid system, which has been shown to play a key role in fetal brain development and in pregnancy, including implantation of the embryo in the uterus and maintenance of the placenta.

In the current study, investigators found that among the 4.83 million mother-infant pairs analyzed in the study, 20,237 women received a delivery discharge diagnosis of cannabis use disorder, which goes beyond occasional cannabis use and involves meeting specific criteria for a pattern of continued cannabis use despite negative consequences. Not all people who use cannabis meet the criteria for cannabis use disorder, and in this study, diagnoses were based on self-reported information. Because of this, investigators noted that the actual incidence of cannabis use and cannabis use disorder in the study population were likely much higher than reported.

The analysis revealed diagnoses of cannabis use disorders based on medical records at delivery rose from 2% in 2001 to 6.9% in 2012. To assess the correlation between cannabis use disorder and infant health outcomes, investigators compared the mother-infant pairs linked to a cannabis use disorder diagnosis to 40,474 control mother-infant pairs with similar demographics and maternal health factors, including other substance use disorder diagnoses and tobacco use. Infants born to women with cannabis

use disorders were more likely than control group infants to be born preterm, have a low birth weight, and be small for their gestational age. These findings were consistent with previous studies in similar populations.

Investigators also analyzed infant death certificates linked to birth records and found that, while infant mortality was rare overall (less than 1% in either group), infants born to women with a cannabis use disorders diagnosis at delivery were 35% more likely to die within a year of birth than control group infants. Analysis of additional health records revealed that infants born to mothers with cannabis use disorders were less likely to be hospitalized within the same year than control group infants, which differs from previous analyses that found a correlation between prenatal cannabis exposure and neonatal intensive care unit admission.

The data reinforces the case for caution around using cannabis during pregnancy and allows researchers to responsibly study how cannabis use affects the developing child, all while a natural experiment is playing out across our country in places where cannabis is becoming widely legalized and available to pregnant consumers.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a United States federal-government research institute whose mission is to "lead the Nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction". For more information please visit www.drugabuse.gov.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is concerned about marijuana use and its negative consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website at www.safeglencove.org.