Twice as many women giving birth have diabetes

Dangerous and rapid increase tied to obesity

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The number of women with diabetes giving birth more than doubled recently, a finding that raises health concerns for both mothers-to-be and babies.

The alarming statistics coincide with an epidemic of type 2 diabetes that has increased dramatically as Americans pack on the pounds.

"We're seeing more people who are overweight and obese, and that's a key risk factor for type 2 diabetes," says Jean Lawrence, lead author of the research. It is published in the May issue of Diabetes Care.

Lawrence and her colleagues at the Kaiser Permanente Department of Research & Evaluation in Pasadena, Calif., studied 175,249 women and teens who had given birth in 11 Southern California Kaiser hospitals between 1999 and 2005. They checked to see how many women were diagnosed with type 1 or type 2 diabetes before giving birth.

The team discovered a rapid increase in the number of diabetic women giving birth during the seven-year period, from 245 women in 1999 to 537 in 2005. The researchers suspect that most of that increase can be attributed to women or teenage girls who had gained weight and developed type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease.

Women or teens who have just developed type 2 diabetes might get pregnant before they know they have the disease, says Sue Kirkman, a vice president for clinical affairs at the American Diabetes Association.

Or sometimes women who already have a diagnosis of either type 1 or type 2 diabetes don't keep blood sugar levels under tight control.

Women who become pregnant under such conditions have elevated blood sugar levels, which puts them and the developing fetus at risk, Lawrence says. Women who get pregnant with out-of-control diabetes are more likely to have a miscarriage or have preeclampsia, a dangerous form of high blood pressure that strikes in pregnancy.

Developing babies who are exposed to high blood sugar levels can have serious birth defects, including heart defects, Lawrence adds.

Overweight women or women with a family history of diabetes should get their blood sugar levels checked before trying to get pregnant, Kirkman says. Many women don't realize they are pregnant at first and don't get a chance to curb sugar levels early.
enough to prevent birth defects that occur in the first trimester, she says.

Once the disease is diagnosed, women should work with a doctor to get sugar levels under control. Women who do so have a better chance of having an uneventful pregnancy and delivering a healthy baby, Lawrence says.

TEXT OF INFO BOX BEGINS HERE

Diabetes in pregnant teens skyrockets

A new study in Southern California found significant jumps in pre-pregnancy diabetes. The researchers believe most of the rise can be traced to obesity and the increase in type 2 diabetes.

The team found:

*Diabetes increased fivefold among 13- to 19-year-olds giving birth.
*Diabetes doubled among women ages 20 to 39.
*Black, Hispanic and Asian women were more likely to have diabetes before pregnancy than white women.

Source: Kaiser Permanente

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