

THE DISABILITY AND PREGNANCY STUDY *snapshot*



Association of pre-existing disability with severe maternal morbidity or maternal mortality in Ontario, Canada

What is the research about?

[Serious pregnancy complications](#) and maternal death are rare but have devastating effects on families. Women with disabilities have high rates of several risk factors for serious pregnancy complications and maternal death, like poverty and chronic illness such as diabetes. Yet, their risk for these outcomes has not been studied.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used health administrative data held at [ICES](#) to look at all Ontario women with a physical, sensory, or intellectual/developmental disability who had a birth between 2003 and 2018. Serious pregnancy complications and maternal death were measured during pregnancy and up to 1 year postpartum.

What did the researchers find?

- Any serious pregnancy complication or maternal death were rare but occurred more often in women with disabilities: in 2.4% of women with a physical disability, 2.1% with a sensory disability, 3.0% with an intellectual or developmental disability, and 3.5% with multiple disabilities, versus 1.7% of women without disabilities.

- Maternal death occurred in about 0.014% of pregnancies in women with disabilities, compared to about 0.008% of pregnancies in women without disabilities.
- Importantly, risks for these outcomes were elevated among women with disabilities during pregnancy as well as across the entire first year postpartum.
- These risks were partly explained by other factors, including poverty and the presence of chronic illness such as diabetes or heart disease.

What you need to know

Pregnancy-related care guidelines and services need to consider the unique needs of women with physical, sensory, and intellectual/developmental disabilities to reduce their risks of rare but serious pregnancy complications.

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About the Disability and Pregnancy Study

The Disability and Pregnancy Study is a research program aiming to enhance the perinatal care of women with disabilities. This work is conducted by an international team of researchers in partnership with a dedicated Advisory Committee comprised of individuals with lived experience, service-providers, and policy-makers.

Support

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Keywords

Disability, Obstetrics, Pregnancy complications



Images in this report were obtained from the following sources:

1. Sunnybrook Hospital. (2017). Making pregnancy more accessible for women with disabilities. Retrieved June 29, 2018 from <http://health.sunnybrook.ca/pregnancy/accessible-care-pregnancy-clinic/>
2. BabyCentre. (2018). Baby signing. Retrieved June 29, 2018 from <https://www.babycentre.co.uk/a547348/baby-signing>
3. American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults. (2010). Blind children with additional disabilities. Retrieved June 29, 2018 from <https://nfb.org/Images/nfb/Publications/fr/fr29/2/fr2902tc.htm>

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How can we use this research?

Women with disabilities may benefit from additional pre-pregnancy and pregnancy supports to address risk factors for serious pregnancy complications and maternal death, including poverty and chronic illness such as diabetes and heart disease. Comprehensive postpartum care is also needed well beyond the standard single appointment mandated at 6 weeks postpartum for the general population. As more women with disabilities experience pregnancy, it is critical to provide them the care necessary to avoid rare but severe pregnancy complications.

About the researchers

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Do you want to know more?

This snapshot is based on the following article: Brown HK, Ray JG, Chen S, Guttman A, Haverkamp S, Parish S, Vigod SN, Tarasoff LA, Lunsky Y. Association of pre-existing disability and severe maternal morbidity or maternal mortality in Ontario, Canada. *JAMA Network Open* 2021;4(1):e2034993.

For more information about this article or the Disability and Pregnancy Study, contact Dr. Hilary Brown at hk.brown@utoronto.ca.

