



This information has been gathered by The Cleft Lip & Palate Foundation of Smiles. We are responding to the fact that a number of our members have questions concerning the safety of medications that they had taken during pregnancy, or may take during a future pregnancy. These medications may be the cause of craniofacial differences. Our goal is to ensure that our families have resources and facts about the medications that may be taken during pregnancy, so you can have informed discussions with the treating doctors.

Online at www.cleftsmile.org

Contact us by email at rachel@cleftsmile.org

The Cleft Lip & Palate Foundation of Smiles provides research on craniofacial causes (genetics, environmental, prescription drugs), treatments (cleft palate teams, medical devices, therapies), and available support for families.

This PDF is about birth defect risks for women who get pregnant. The use of pharmaceutical medications, environmental factors, prenatal care, medical conditions, smoking, drug use, drinking and genetics can all play a role in causing birth defects. This PDF is intended to inform women of childbearing-age about these factors.



RESEARCH AND RECENT STUDIES

Birth Defects

[According to the Centers for Disease Control,](#)

about one in every 33 babies is born with a birth defect. Birth defects are a leading cause of infant death, accounting for more than one of every five infant deaths. Babies born with birth defects have a greater chance of illness and long term disability than babies without birth defects.

What are birth defects?

Birth defects are abnormalities present at birth that cause physical or mental disability. Some birth defects may be fatal. Birth defects like cleft lip, cleft palate, heart defects, club feet, craniofacial malformations and spina bifida are birth defects that occur as a result of certain drugs taken while pregnant. Sometimes birth defects just happen and the cause is unknown.

What causes birth defects?

Most birth defects occur in the first three months or first trimester of pregnancy, when the organs of the baby are forming. This is a very important stage of development. Although, some birth defects occur later in pregnancy.

[Birth defects have a variety of causes:](#)

- Women who take certain prescription and over-the-counter drugs such as drugs for seizures, migraine headaches, depression, acne, to name a few
- Women who smoke or drink alcohol during pregnancy
- Women who have certain medical conditions, such as obesity or diabetes
- Women who have family members with birth defects, as well as men who have a history of birth defects
- Women who have exposure to environmental contaminants
- Women who get infections before or during pregnancy. Infections that can cause birth defects include German measles, cytomegalovirus (CMV)—herpes virus, syphilis, toxoplasmosis, Venezuelan equine encephalitis, parvovirus, and, rarely, chickenpox
- Sometimes the cause is unknown.



What is the problem with birth defects and medications?

There is generally a lack of information about the effects of many medications taken by pregnant women. Although the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates and tests medications to ensure effectiveness and safety, it is unethical to test drugs on pregnant women.

Pregnant animals sometimes are studied to help identify harmful medications. But animal studies don't always show how medications affect humans. Over-the-counter medications and dietary or herbal products are not always tested in animals.

Without testing, little information is available about the safety of prescription and over-the-counter medications as well as herbal supplements during pregnancy.

What are regulatory agencies doing about birth defects?

For instance the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) track the cause and effect of birth defects as well as disseminate information about birth defects prevention and help fund agencies that collect data. Some of these agencies include:

The CDC funds 14 states to track major birth defects. The state birth defects tracking systems use the data for prevention and referral of affected children to needed services. The 14 states are AZ, CO, FL, IL, KY, LA, MI, MN, NH, NJ, OH, OK, RI, and Puerto Rico.

Metropolitan Atlanta Congenital Defects Program (MACDP) is the first population-based system to actively track birth defects starting back in 1967. The program studies children born to residents in the Atlanta area.

National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) serves as a forum to exchange ideas for preventing birth defects and developing new tracking methods. It also identifies risk factors for birth defects.

International Clearinghouse for Birth Defects Surveillance and Research (ICBDSR) brings together birth defects programs from around the world with the aim of conducting worldwide tracking and research to prevent birth defects and to improve the lives of people born with these conditions.

Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) tracks the ongoing collection, integration, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of data on environmental hazards, exposures to those hazards, and health effects that may be related to the exposures. The EPHT Network tracks the prevalence of defects and publishes annual data tables and maps in the national portal. Currently, the national portal has birth defects data for Colorado, Florida, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, and Utah.

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Do you have more questions? Do you need resources?

Is there such a thing as too much information? Sometimes the need is overwhelming. Sometimes you just feel like stepping back and asking questions to others whose children have similar birth defects. Sometimes you just want to or need to be ensconced by others' support.

For questions and resources about cleft lip and cleft palate, please contact: [The Cleft Lip and Palate Foundation of Smiles](#). Cleft lip or palate is one of the most common birth defects, currently affecting one in 600 children in the United States. The Foundation was formed by a young mother of

twins both born with cleft lip and palate. The Foundation offers positive support to parents of children with craniofacial differences by offering news, information on cleft palate teams, [state by state resources](#), [birth registry listings](#), and a [support group](#) where you can meet other families in your local area who are going through the same or similar concerns and where you can share and express useful information.



References

Update on overall prevalence of major birth defects—Atlanta, Georgia, 1978-2005. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2008; 57:1-5.

Martin JA, Kung HC, Mathews TJ, et al. Annual summary of vital statistics: 2006. *Pediatrics* 2008; 121:788-801.

[Kids Health Birth Defects](#)

[National Institute of Child Health & Development](#)

Blog: The EnvironmentalList—[Herbicide Associated with Birth Defects in Infants](#)

Tainted Water on Tap, Stephanie Chalupka EdD, APRN, BC, CNS AJN, *American Journal of Nursing*, November 2005, Volume 105 Number 11, Pages 40-52.

Other Research from The Cleft Lip & Palate Foundation of Smiles

Research and Recent Studies:

[Causes of Cleft Lip and Palate: Clomid](#)

[Causes of Cleft Lip and Palate: Health Insurance](#)

[Causes of Cleft Lip and Palate: Hydrocodone](#)

[Causes of Cleft Lip and Palate: Special Education](#)

[Causes of Cleft Lip and Palate: SSRIs](#)

[Causes of Cleft Lip and Palate: Topamax](#)

