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Pregnant women with asthma can be more confident
about some medicines

Budesonide sprays can be regarded as safe for pregnancy - other asthma drugs have not been as well studied though

Cologne, Germany: 3 December 2008. Women can usually keep using the same asthma drugs they were using before they got pregnant. Budesonide sprays are the best studied and can be regarded as safe. More trials of other essential medicines are necessary however. According to the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG), more data from trials could reassure women who worry about the safety of their drugs during pregnancy. The Institute has reviewed the evidence on asthma in pregnancy and published information for pregnant women on its website, www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org>).

More trials on medications in pregnancy are necessary

Pregnant women with asthma want to know whether it is possible for the medications they take to harm their baby - and they want to know what they can do to reduce the risks of their asthma for their unborn baby. "Regulations ensure that drug product information lists unanswered safety questions about use in pregnancy. That can be somewhat misleading and cause anxiety. Imprecise research results in medical journals sometimes lead to worrying media reports. Some recent reports in Germany even wrongly suggested that asthma drugs could cause a malformation rate of almost 10%," according to the Institute's Director, Professor Peter Sawicki.

Essential medicines are generally not researched enough in pregnancy, and so remain associated with a lot of uncertainty. This can be a big problem for pregnant women. Professor Sawicki said: "In some countries large birth registers provide information on medication use in pregnancy and malformations in babies. But that cannot replace the more precise assessment from trials. There need to more trials that pregnant women can participate in. We need more reliable knowledge about the effects of essential medicines in pregnancy."

Avoiding asthma attacks is critical in pregnancy

Good self-management can keep asthma under control. "For women with asthma who have not been actively self-managing their asthma, pregnancy is a good time to start," Professor Sawicki said. "Good asthma control prevents asthma attacks, and that ensures that the baby's oxygen supply is not interrupted. It lowers the risk of

needing to be hospitalised with an asthma attack."

Women with asthma can usually keep using the same medications during pregnancy that helped them before. Pregnancy is not a good time to try out treatments where little is known about the effects on unborn babies. Most asthma medications have not been studied in trials that include pregnant women. However, budesonide sprays have been studied enough: women can be confident about budesonide's safety for pregnancy. Budesonide is a steroid.

Quitting smoking reduces the risk of a baby developing asthma

Quitting smoking is the best thing a woman can do to protect her baby from developing asthma. "Researchers are studying a variety of options for preventing asthma in babies, including diet and probiotics. Quitting smoking is the only effective prevention that has been demonstrated to date", according to Professor Sawicki. This also counts for the father: when parents quit smoking, they can reduce the risk that their child will later develop asthma or allergies.

The Institute's website, www.informedhealthonline.org (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org>), provides the public with easy-to-understand information about current medical developments and research on important health issues. If you would like to be kept up-to-date with the latest publications on the independent health information website, you can subscribe to the [informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org) newsletter (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/newsletter.69.en.html>).

Information - Asthma in pregnancy:

<http://www.informedhealthonline.org/a-z-list.579.56.en.html> (URL: <http://www.gesundheitsinformation.de/a-z-list.579.56.en.html>)

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Glossary

evidence

Evidence is what we call scientific proof from well-conducted, good-quality scientific trials that have been carefully designed to answer specific questions. Depending on the types of questions, different scientific research methods (types of study) are most appropriate to find reliable answers to these questions. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), for example, are the best way to get reliable evidence on the effectiveness of medical treatments (interventions). This type of study, however, is not the best form of evidence for all possible questions, and does not provide the best answers to all kinds of questions, either. Epidemiological studies, for example, are very suitable for establishing well-founded proof for the spreading of a disease in the population.

asthma

Asthma (asthma bronchiale) is a permanent (chronic) disease with symptoms like coughing and breathlessness often occurring in acute attacks. In asthma, the airways are overly sensitive. The development of asthma is often associated with an overreaction to foreign substances or physical stimuli, frequently in connection with an allergy.

Sources

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG) was established by legislation to provide evaluations of the effectiveness, quality and efficiency of healthcare services. This includes the assessment of medicines as well as the publication of health information for consumers and patients.

Evidence basis of our health information

Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **www.informedhealthonline.org**

Disclaimer

This information was prepared and published by the German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). It is based on the evidence and other scientific literature available at the time of publication. The information is intended for the use of patients in Germany. It is not intended to for use to diagnose illnesses and the information is not intended to substitute for medical advice.