

## Remember...

Effects of drug and alcohol use are different for every pregnancy and every infant, depending on reasons such as:

- amount used
- if other drugs are used, and which ones
- when in the pregnancy the drugs are used
- mother's general health
- other risks in the baby's environment

It helps you and your baby if you cut back or stop using opioids at any point in your pregnancy.

### **For more information about the effects of opioid use during pregnancy, call:**

- your doctor
- a public health nurse
- an alcohol and drug counsellor
- MotherRisk infoline (confidential counselling)  
Toll Free 1-877-327-4636

#### **Sheway**

369 Hawks Avenue, Vancouver, B.C.  
Phone: 604-658-1200

#### **A/D Information Line**

Phone: 604-660-9382  
1-800-663-1441

#### **Detox Access Line**

Phone: 604-658-1250

#### **Pender Clinic**

59 W. Pender  
Phone: 604-669-9181

#### **3-Bridges Community Health Centre**

1292 Hornby Street, Vancouver  
Phone: 604-736-9844

#### **Community Aboriginal Health Advocate:**

Phone: 604-873-1833

#### **Mental Health Liaison Worker**

Phone: 604-872-6723

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Prevention Services

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Health Centre of British Columbia

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# Opioid Use During Pregnancy

## Effects on Mother and Baby



4500 Oak Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6H 3N1

## How do opioids work?

These drugs include morphine, codeine, heroin, pethidine, methadone, talwin, and leritine. Opium, a poppy seed extract, is one of the oldest medications known. It's main active ingredient is morphine, a very effective drug used for pain relief. Although we hear the most about heroin, some of the most commonly abused opioids are prescription drugs, i.e., Tylenol #3, Demerol. Heroin is often cut with other substances (talc, cornstarch, cocaine, quinine, sugars) to add weight and taste, and give more stimulation effects.

## What are the effects of opioids for the pregnant woman?

Risks to the mother relate to the drug as well as the use of needles to inject the drug. **If you are pregnant and using opioids, DO NOT suddenly stop using them.** This may increase risk to your baby, as babies may experience withdrawal even before they are born. Ups and downs in use is stressful for the baby in the womb, possibly causing a lack of oxygen and slower growth.

Risks related to drug use are often due to: a) the mother not having received regular prenatal care, not eating properly, or b) the baby experiencing withdrawal before birth.

These risks include:

- increase in miscarriage and stillbirth
- higher risk of abruptio placenta (separation of the placenta from the wall of the uterus)

Risks related to needle use include:

- transmission of HIV or hepatitis
- risk of infections in the skin, body tissue, or heart

## What are the effects of prenatal opioid use on the baby?

60-90% of babies whose mothers regularly use opioids experience a degree of Neonatal withdrawal.

Withdrawal signs usually start within 72 hours after birth. Babies may require medication to help with the symptoms.

Common signs of withdrawal are:

- irritability
- lots of crying
- problems with sleeping, feeding, and settling down
- stomach upset (gas cramps, spitting up, diarrhea)
- tense muscles
- poor sleeping

As well as withdrawal symptoms at birth, some babies may have milder symptoms up to one year of age.

Other risks for the baby are:

- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- premature birth
- smaller weight and head size at birth

If you need regular use of opioids during pregnancy (i.e. for chronic back pain), talk to your doctor about the chance that your newborn may require treatment for withdrawal.

## What about breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding is considered safe for the baby if mother is on methadone maintenance and possibly with opioid use prescribed by a doctor for short periods. Breastfeeding is not recommended with any other illegal opioid use or if the mother is HIV-positive. Check with your doctor.

## What are the outcomes for children?

Despite withdrawal difficulties in the first year of life, children exposed prenatally to opioids do well if the mother did not abuse other drugs and if the children are raised in a supportive environment.