

Home pregnancy tests can lead to better prenatal care

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The simple intervention of providing women who are having unprotected sex with a home pregnancy test could have a substantial impact on the health of potential newborns, according to a Michigan State University study.

In research published this month in the February edition of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, MSU's Mary Nettleman found that significantly more women who had a home pregnancy test at home not only suspected they could be pregnant but also took tests much more frequently.

"The top reason women do not seek prenatal care is they do not realize they are pregnant," said Nettleman, chairperson of the College of Human Medicine's Department of Medicine. "In addition, women who do not realize they are pregnant will not change harmful behaviors such as drinking and smoking, which can lead to developmental problems in newborns."

Nettleman added that one of the most common reasons for unintended pregnancy is that women don't feel they are at high risk for pregnancy.

"This simple intervention - giving home pregnancy test kits to women who are having unprotected sex - was able to do what no other study has done: Influence women to be more vigilant about potential pregnancy," she said.

Participants in the study, which was funded by the Michigan Department of Community Health, were low-income, adult women who were having unprotected sex and not trying to conceive. Women in the intervention group were given free home-pregnancy tests and were able to order more kits as needed.

Women in that group suspected they might be pregnant almost twice as often as women in the control group. Once pregnancy was suspected, 93 percent of the women in the intervention group had a pregnancy test, versus 64 percent in the control group.

Another important aspect of the study is that pregnancy recognition is a powerful behavioral stimulus, Nettleman said.

"Telling a woman she is pregnant will often cause her to immediately stop or cut down on smoking, drinking and other behaviors that can hurt the baby," she said. "The problem is that many women do not recognize they are pregnant for several weeks, which is all it takes for the heart and brain to form. Earlier pregnancy recognition could have a huge impact on the health of newborns in this country."

Source: Michigan State University

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