

Anaesthetic linked to learning problems in children

August 28 2012

(Medical Xpress)—Children who are given anaesthetic before the age of three may have an increased risk of developing learning difficulties, according to a new study involving researchers at The University of Western Australia.

But researchers have cautioned there is not enough evidence at this stage to change current [medical practice](#) and parents should not avoid or delay surgery for their children if needed.

An analysis of the long-term effects of anaesthesia on young children - using the Western Australian Pregnancy Cohort (Raine) Study, which is studying 2868 children born in WA between 1989 and 1992—was published this week in the US journal *Pediatrics*.

Professor Britta Regli-von Ungern-Sternberg, Chair of Paediatric Anaesthesia in UWA's School of Medicine and Pharmacology, said the study assessed the effects of early childhood exposure to anaesthesia in the first three years of life on long-term differences in language and cognitive function.

"We looked at 321 children from the Raine study who were exposed to anaesthesia for surgery and [diagnostic testing](#) before the age of three and found they were about twice as likely to develop a significant [language impairment](#) and three times more likely to have problems with abstract reasoning by the age of 10, when compared to children who were not exposed to anaesthesia and surgery," Professor Regli-von Ungern-

Sternberg said.

"But the study does not allow us to determine if the cause of these increased impairments were due to anaesthesia, surgery or the medical condition that required the intervention."

Professor Regli-von Ungern-Sternberg said the study was not definitive and more work needed to be done to look at the long-term effects of anaesthesia on young children.

"The most important thing I want to emphasise is that these results do not mean that children should not have surgery if it is needed," she said.

"Parents should consult their surgeon to see if the procedure is necessary. Any concerns regarding [anaesthesia](#) and potential anaesthetic implications for their child should be discussed with their anaesthetist before surgery."

The [Raine Study](#) is one of the largest and most successful studies of pregnancy, childhood, adolescence and young adulthood anywhere in the world.

Provided by University of Western Australia

Citation: Anaesthetic linked to learning problems in children (2012, August 28) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-anaesthetic-linked-problems-children.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.