

Cannabis use in pregnancy linked to poorer outcomes for babies

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The use of cannabis during pregnancy leads to poorer health outcomes for babies, according to research from the University of Adelaide's Robinson Research Institute.

Published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, the study found that continued use of cannabis at 15 weeks of pregnancy was associated with significantly lower birthweight, head circumference, birth length, and gestational age at birth, as well as with more frequent severe neonatal morbidity or death.

Study leader, Dr. Luke Grzeskowiak, from the Robinson Research Institute at the University of Adelaide, says cannabis is the [illicit drug](#) most widely used by women of reproductive age in Australia, but the effects of its use during pregnancy on neonatal outcomes were unclear.

"In this study, involving researchers from Australia, the UK and New Zealand, we found that continued and high frequency of cannabis use during pregnancy were both associated with significantly poorer neonatal outcomes, independent of tobacco use," Dr. Grzeskowiak said.

Further, the frequency of severe neonatal morbidity and death was higher for babies of mothers who continued to use cannabis at 15 weeks, which is consistent with the results of a recent American study. In contrast, no differences in any neonatal outcomes were seen among women who reported they stopped using cannabis in early pregnancy. This should be reassuring to women who used cannabis before they knew they were pregnant.

"How cannabis might impair neonatal outcomes is unclear, but we know that components of cannabis can cross the placenta and this raises a number of concerns about effects on [child health](#) and development," said Grzeskowiak.

"In light of these findings, further investigation of the potential long-term effects of cannabis use during pregnancy on child health and development is warranted."

Dr. Grzeskowiak said he hoped the findings could also be used to educate [women](#) and [health care professionals](#) about the possible harms of cannabis use during [pregnancy](#).

"This is particularly important given the increasing perception in the community that cannabis is a safe drug," he said.

More information: Luke E Grzeskowiak et al. The deleterious effects of cannabis during pregnancy on neonatal outcomes, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2020). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50624](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50624)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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