

FACTS ABOUT ANTIDEPRESSANT USE DURING PREGNANCY



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For many years, drug makers and psychiatrists misleadingly claimed that antidepressant use during pregnancy was safe or, weighed up against the risk of “depression,” was necessary. However, in 2005, following publicity about the dangers of antidepressants causing withdrawal effects and birth defects, numerous studies and drug regulatory agencies issued warnings about this.

In October 2009, a jury in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, US, determined that GlaxoSmithKline’s antidepressant, Paxil (paroxetine), caused birth defects and awarded the parents of 3-year-old Lyam Kilker, \$2.5 million. His mother had taken the drug during pregnancy.

Following is an example of studies and drug regulatory warnings:

Infant Withdrawal Effects

August 2003: The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration reported that the use of SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor) antidepressants during and immediately following pregnancy could result in adverse reactions to newborn babies, due to the withdrawal effects or a toxic effect from ingestion of an SSRI in breast-milk. The withdrawal effects included agitation, jitteriness, poor feeding, sleepiness/lethargy, gastrointestinal symptoms and hypotonia (deficient tone or tension).

February 2006: A study published in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine determined that nearly one-third of newborn infants whose mothers took SSRI antidepressants during pregnancy experienced withdrawal symptoms that included high-pitched crying, tremors and disturbed sleep.

Birth Defects

July 2003: A study published in The Archives of General Psychiatry found that infants whose mothers took SSRIs during pregnancy could suffer neurological problems during their first weeks of life. Symptoms included tremors, restlessness and rigidity. Other studies showed the symptoms also included irritability, constant crying, convulsions and eating and sleeping disorders.

September 2005: The Food and Drug Administration warned of increased risk of major birth defects, including heart malformations in newborn infants. The Paxil website also reported complications, including difficulties with breathing, turning blue, seizures, changing body temperature, feeding problems, vomiting, low blood sugar, floppiness, stiffness, shakiness, irritability or constant crying... There have also been reports of premature births in pregnant women exposed to SSRIs, including Paxil.” Australia also issued a similar warning.” A Danish study found a 60% increase in cardiac abnormalities among babies of mothers taking SSRIs.

March 2006: Health Canada issued a warning that pregnant women taking SSRIs and other newer antidepressants placed newborns at risk of developing a serious lung disorder. In May, the German Drug regulatory Agency (BfArM) issued a Risk Information on paroxetine about the increased the risk of cardiac malformation in newborns when the mother took the drug during pregnancy.

March 2010: The Irish Medicines Board published a Drug Safety Newsletter report warning about the increased risk of heart birth defects and the use of fluoxetine during the first three months of pregnancy.