Antiviral Medication During Pregnancy

The Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS) has published an information sheet regarding the use of antiviral medications to treat/prevent influenza (the flu) during pregnancy. According to OTIS, there are four antiviral medications currently approved in the U.S. for influenza prevention and treatment: Symmetrel, Flumadine, Tamiflu, and Relenza. Limited information indicates that antiviral medications do not increase the risk for birth defects. The manufacturer of Tamiflu reported no increase in birth defects or pregnancy complications among 100 women who used the medication during pregnancy. There was also no increase in birth defects or problems in 137 babies born to women who were treated with Tamiflu during pregnancy. In addition, there was no increase in birth defects in 90 women who took Tamiflu in the first trimester and spoke to a teratology information service. There is less information available about the safety of the other antiviral medications during pregnancy. There are only a few reports of Relenza use in pregnancy, as Relenza is given by inhalation. This limits the amount of medication that gets into your bloodstream. For this reason, Relenza may have less risk of crossing the placenta and getting to the developing baby.

According to OTIS, limited information from animal and human studies does not suggest an increased risk for birth defects or pregnancy complications when Symmetrel or Flumadine are used in pregnancy. One study of 108 babies born to women receiving Symmetrel or Flumadine during pregnancy did not find an increased risk for harmful effects.

OTIS is currently conducting the OTIS Vaccines and Medications in Pregnancy Study (VAMPSS). The purpose of the study is to learn more about influenza vaccines
and antiviral medication use in pregnancy. If you are pregnant and have received the influenza vaccine or have taken an antiviral medication to prevent or treat the flu, and you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact the OTIS VAMPSS Coordinating Center at 877-311-8972.

For further information regarding this article, please see “Antiviral Medications to Treat/Prevent Influenza (the flu) during Pregnancy” from the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists. You can view this information at www.OTISpregnancy.org or call OTIS at 1-866-626-6847. Or, contact Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D., at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, N.E., 309W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9829 or visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD.

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