

Researchers Call for National Guidelines aimed at Pregnant Women

-Cork study shows that 17% of pregnant women have a Vitamin D deficiency amongst 1786 mothers surveyed at Cork University Maternity Hospital.

Researchers at University College Cork (UCC) have reported that high Vitamin D status is associated with lower risk of pregnancy complications such as pre-eclampsia and small-for-gestational age (SGA) birth.

The findings, published this week in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, come from analysis of vitamin D status in the SCOPE (Screening for Pregnancy Endpoints) Ireland study. The project aims to develop screening tests to predict and prevent the major complications of late pregnancy, such as pre-eclampsia, SGA and spontaneous preterm birth.

Prof Mairead Kiely, who leads the Maternal and Child Nutrition research programme at INFANT, and is co-Director of the Cork Centre for Vitamin D and Nutrition Research noted that *“The data highlights the need to conduct nutrition research in vulnerable populations, such as pregnancy and breastfeeding women and children, in order to develop life-stage specific recommendations for nutrient intakes. Currently in Ireland, there are no pregnancy-specific guidelines for vitamin D intake. This is true of many countries as few research studies are carried out in women during pregnancy. Through the EC-funded ODIN project on vitamin D and Human Health, co-ordinated by our group at UCC, we are following up the results of this analysis in SCOPE with a vitamin D intervention study in pregnant women, which will be completed before the end of the year. This data will provide the evidence to make pregnancy-specific recommendations for vitamin D to prevent deficiency and protect mothers and their babies.”*

The study surveyed 1786 mothers who attended Cork University Maternity Hospital and was designed to explore whether there was a connection between vitamin D status in early pregnancy and any major pregnancy complications. The study showed that 17% of the pregnant women were at high risk of vitamin D deficiency, compared with 12% of non-pregnant women of the same age. It also reported a lower risk of pregnancy complications among women with high vitamin D status.

Prof Louise Kenny, Director of the INFANT Centre, explained that the research *“is about helping mothers and their babies: our goal here is to look at the data and what we can learn to help mums have safe pregnancies and deliver healthy babies. Nutrition is a large part of that. This study is an example of collaboration at work between clinicians and scientists to improve maternal and infant health, which is at the core of what we are doing at INFANT.”*

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