



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Keep Baby's Heart Healthy

Congenital Heart Defects Awareness Week — February 7-14, 2016

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Birth defects have a lifetime impact on quality of life and are common in the United States. Congenital heart defects, or CHDs, are among the *most* common.

Dr. Sherry Farr is a researcher with CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She's joining us today to discuss the causes of and possible ways to prevent congenital heart defects. Welcome to the show, Sherry.

[Dr. Farr] Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Sherry, let's start with how many people in the United States have heart defects?

[Dr. Farr] It's estimated that about two million people in the U.S. have a CHD, and because individuals with CHD live longer lives, over half of those people are adults.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is a congenital heart defect always evident at birth or early on, say in the first year of life?

[Dr. Farr] Well, there are many different types of CHD and the symptoms will vary by the type or severity of the CHD. Some people may experience no symptoms at all, some other people may have symptoms that develop over time, and then, for others, those symptoms are evident at birth.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, what are symptoms of CHD?

[Dr. Farr] Some babies may have *blue baby*, or a bluish color of the infant's lips, skin, or fingernails, and this is really due to low amounts of oxygen in the baby's blood. Some babies may have difficulty breathing, feeding, and gaining weight and growing normally, and then, longer term, some children may experience problems with development and may need special education services. And then children and adults with CHD may experience fatigue, or tiredness, during physical activity.

[Dr. Gaynes] Sherry, how are CHDs treated and can they be corrected?

[Dr. Farr] So, there is no cure for individuals with CHD and those individuals will need lifelong specialized health care. Simple repairs can be done using a catheter, which is a thin flexible tube, inserted into a vein or artery. And this is done to either close holes in the heart or, alternatively, to widen openings to the heart, depending on the person's type of CHD. More complex CHD may require one or more surgeries and, more rarely, heart transplants are needed. Although CHD can be a devastating diagnosis for families, a substantial number of people with CHD live full, productive lives.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, what can a woman do to decrease her chances of giving birth to a child with CHD?

[Dr. Farr] Some CHDs are due to genetic factors, but for a large majority of cases, the cause is really unknown. However, women can decrease their risk of having a baby with CHD. We know that uncontrolled diabetes may increase a woman's risk of having a baby with CHD. Therefore, women with diabetes should try to control their diabetes before pregnancy. Women can also quit smoking and achieve a healthy weight before pregnancy. And opioid pain relievers and certain types of antidepressants may also increase a woman's risk of having a baby with CHD, so it's recommended that women talk to their doctor about what types of medications they're taking before they become pregnant in order to find the best treatment for themselves during pregnancy.

[Dr. Gaynes] Sherry, where can listeners get more information about congenital heart defects?

[Dr. Farr] Listeners can go to cdc.gov and, in the search box, type *heart defect*. On the website, there are personal stories about people with CHD and their families.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Sherry. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Sherry Farr about congenital heart defects. If a mother smokes, has poorly controlled diabetes before pregnancy, takes certain medications, or is exposed to pesticides at work, her baby might be at higher risk for certain congenital heart defects. If you're pregnant or thinking about having a baby, ask your health care provider about ways to *increase* your chances of having a healthy baby.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.