Ep. 94 – How Birth Defect Surveillance Protects Moms & Babies: From Zika to Opioid Exposure

How do public health experts detect emerging risks to pregnancies before they become widespread crises? In this episode of The MotherToBaby Podcast, host Chris Stallman, genetic counselor, mom of four, and teratogen information specialist, sits down with Dr. Amanda Elmore, Assistant Professor of Maternal & Child Health at the University of South Florida, to explore the powerful role of birth defect surveillance.

Dr. Elmore shares how her career in public health began during the Zika virus epidemic—reviewing medical records of exposed infants to help the CDC understand the real-world impact of in-utero exposure. She explains how surveillance systems track structural and functional birth anomalies, serve as early warning systems for new and emerging exposures, and shape everything from clinical care and referral services to national public health policy.

The conversation also dives into:

- How surveillance led to rapid public health responses during the Zika crisis
- What neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) reveals about opioid exposure during pregnancy
- The push for real-time data using electronic medical records and health information exchanges
- How machine learning and natural language processing may transform how cases are identified
- Why a life-course perspective matters for children born with birth defects
- How surveillance data supports funding, prevention efforts, and long-term family services

Dr. Elmore also shares her vision for the future: a more standardized, timely, and integrated national system that can better support prevention, research, and lifelong care for affected children and families.

This episode offers a behind-the-scenes look at how data quietly powers some of the most important protections for moms and babies.

 Have questions about exposures during pregnancy or breastfeeding?
You can contact MotherToBaby for free, confidential, evidence-based information:
 Call: 866-626-6847
 Text: 855-999-3525
 Visit: https://mothertobaby.org/

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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Kirstie Perrotta, MPH, and Angela Messer, MS, join host Chris Stallman, CGC in this special “summer grab bag” of topics related to common summer activities during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Our guest experts talk about everything from chlorine and sunscreen to Zika.

Kirstie Perrotta, MPH, is an information specialist at MotherToBaby California, where she provides counseling by phone and chat. She received her Masters in Public Health (MPH) from the University of San Francisco, and has worked in the field of reproductive health for over 9 years. Kirstie currently serves as a member of the MotherToBaby Emerging Issues Task Force (EITF). Her interests include vaccines, infectious disease, and mental health during pregnancy.

Angela Messer, MS, is an information specialist with MotherToBaby California. She earned her undergraduate degree in psychology from Chapman University and her graduate degree from Kansas State University in academic

advising/counseling. Angela has been with MotherToBaby since 2009, with experience in both research and counseling. She appreciates the opportunity to speak with people who are pregnant and/or breastfeeding and healthcare professionals regarding exposures and medications, and holds a special interest in stress and anxiety in pregnancy and breastfeeding.

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Our experts continue the conversation about Zika Virus and why we're still talking about it well after its initial outbreak. We answer questions about men and Zika, planning a pregnancy and Zika, and much more. Lorrie Harris-Sagaribay, MPH, a bilingual teratogen information specialist at MotherToBaby North Carolina and Kirstie Perrotta, MPH, a teratogen information specialist at MotherToBaby California join host Chris Stallman, a certified genetic counselor, teratogen information specialist and mother of four, to answer the public's questions.

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Ep. 94 – How Birth Defect Surveillance Protects Moms & Babies: From Zika to Opioid Exposure

Why are we still talking about Zika Virus? Should I still be concerned about it if I'm pregnant and traveling to another country this holiday season? Lorrie Harris-Sagaribay, MPH, a bilingual teratogen information specialist at MotherToBaby North Carolina and Kirstie Perrotta, MPH, a teratogen information specialist at MotherToBaby California join host Chris Stallman, CGC to answer the public's questions about Zika Virus, its potential effects during pregnancy and why it's still a critical topic years after its initial outbreak.

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