Marijuana Safety in Pregnancy: Researchers Descend on Denver to Discuss Latest Data



Birth Defects Experts, Colorado Chief Medical Officer to Present at OTIS, Teratology Society, DNTS Annual Meeting

DENVER, COLORADO—"From exposure during pregnancy to a child's neurological development, it is an understatement to say the legalization of marijuana has the potential to impact Colorado's children and families," said Larry Wolk, MD, Chief Medical Officer for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. That "potential impact" is why Dr. Wolk will join top international researchers for a meeting never before held in Denver that brings together world-renowned experts presenting the science behind birth defects research.

The meeting, which is held jointly with the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), the Teratology Society and the Developmental Neurotoxicology Society this week at the Grand Hyatt Denver, will have a special focus on the effects of marijuana exposure during pregnancy. Dr. Wolk will serve as the Keynote Speaker Monday, June 26 at 8am. Then, a "Marijuana and Child Development Symposium," which features scientists from the University of Colorado at Denver, University of California at San Diego, Yale University and the National Institute on Drug Abuse, takes place Tuesday, June 27 at 3:05pm.

According to MotherToBaby, a service of OTIS that offers information to the public about exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding through traditional and digital avenues, the growing rate of marijuana use during pregnancy is "deeply concerning." A federal survey published late last year indicated that almost 4 percent of expecting mothers said they had used marijuana in the past 30 days. This rate is almost twice that for other illicit drugs used in the previous month by pregnant women.
The survey was conducted in 2014. In a survey just 12 years prior, only 2.4 percent had said they used marijuana in the past month.

"As scientists specializing in the effects exposures can have during pregnancy, this trend is extremely worrisome and we're here to work together to find answers," said Stephen Braddock, MD, OTIS/MotherToBaby's president and a professor of Pediatrics at Saint Louis University. "At MotherToBaby, we are frequently contacted by women who want to know if marijuana is safe in pregnancy. New information that will be shared at this meeting will help us to gain a better idea of what the risks are, so that we can better educate expectant and nursing moms as well as healthcare providers."

"While data are somewhat limited, we know there are risks associated with marijuana use in pregnancy, but we also need to be thinking about the potential impact of cannabis on the adolescent brain," added Diana Dow-Edwards, PhD, President-elect of the Developmental Neurotoxicology Society, marijuana symposium co-chair, and professor at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. "New and breakthrough science will be presented by some of our speakers and we hope the knowledge stimulates discussion among concerned Denver-area health care providers and the general public alike," noted Susan Makris, PhD, Teratology Society Public Affairs Committee chair, marijuana symposium co-chair and a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency scientist.

Additional scientific information presented during the meeting includes e-cigarette use in pregnancy and the latest Zika virus findings. More information and the full annual meeting program may be found on the 57th Annual Meeting website. One day registration is available for any local scientists and health care providers interested in attending.

About OTIS/MotherToBaby
MotherToBaby, a service of the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), is a suggested resource by many agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Office of Women's Health. OTIS was established in 1987 as a way of connecting world-renowned experts in the field of birth defects research to the general public. Today, MotherToBaby affiliates around the world provide the most cutting-edge and up-to-date information about the risks of medications, chemicals, herbal products, illicit drugs, diseases and much more during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. More than 100,000 women and their health care providers seek information about birth defects prevention from MotherToBaby every year. MotherToBaby has been able to embark on new outreach efforts to reach underserved populations and launch new communication technologies through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, as well as through the generous donations made by the public. To learn more about MotherToBaby, the ways to contact its network of experts via app, text, live chat, email and phone line, or how to support its services, please visit www.MotherToBaby.org.

About the Teratology Society
The Teratology Society is made up of nearly 700 members worldwide specializing in a variety of disciplines, including developmental biology and toxicology, reproduction and endocrinology, epidemiology, cell and molecular biology, nutritional biochemistry, and genetics as well as the clinical disciplines of prenatal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics, neonatology, medical genetics, and teratogen risk counseling. Scientists interested in membership in the Teratology Society are encouraged to visit www.teratology.org. The society's official journal, Birth Defects Research, is published by John Wiley & Sons in partnership with the Teratology Society.

About DNTS
The Developmental Neurotoxicology Society (DNTS) is focused on studies of the origins of neurodevelopmental disorders and the long-term effects of chemicals and drugs on health and well-being. We promote scientific research on the developmental origins of brain disorders at all life stages. For more information, please visit us at www.dntshome.org. The society's official journal, Neurotoxicology and Teratology, is published by Elsevier in partnership with DNTS.
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