



Taking certain prescription painkillers early in pregnancy may increase the risk of birth defects such as spina bifida, a new study suggests.

The overall risk of these birth defects is low, the researchers note.

The researchers from Boston University found women who took painkillers such as Vicodin, OxyContin or Percocet early in pregnancy were twice as likely to have babies with neural tube defects such as spina bifida, HealthDay reports. In babies with spina bifida, the spinal column does not completely close.

The risk of birth defects in babies born to women taking prescription opioids was almost six in 10,000 live births.

"We want to keep in mind that major birth defects of any kind affect only 2 percent to 3 percent of live births, so the risks we've identified should be kept in perspective," study author Mahsa Yazdy told HealthDay. "Even though we found a doubling in the risk of neural tube defects, these are still rare occurrences."

The study included mothers of 305 children born with neural tube defects, who were compared to mothers of more than 20,000 infants who were healthy, or who had other types of birth defects that were not related to prescription painkillers.

The findings appear in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology*.

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