

## Study: IVF babies have more birth defects

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Study suggests IVF babies have more birth defectsA story published a few days ago in The Australian reports that researchers at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Perth, Australia analyzed 25 studies from around the world and concluded that in vitro fertilization (IVF) babies consistently showed a 25 to 40 per cent greater risk of abnormalities.

The actual study itself has not been published yet. The authors are quoted however as stating that their study could not determine whether the increased risk seen was due to in vitro fertilization (IVF) or due to the higher risk population being studied. Several studies have indicated that infertile couples may not be representative of the general population and that underlying factors may predispose them to higher risk of pregnancy complications and/or birth defects.

Interestingly, another study by Kathy Hudson, PhD., of John Hopkins University, reviewed 169 studies on children conceived through in vitro fertilization (IVF). (See January 6 2005 BLOG entry). She concluded that in vitro fertilization (IVF) babies do not have higher rates of cancer, malformations, psychological or developmental delays.

So which study is to be believed? This is the current difficulty in counseling couples about the possible risks of in vitro fertilization (IVF). At this point there is no clear and conclusive data that in vitro fertilization (IVF) itself poses any special risks for birth defects.

Lets assume for the moment that I am wrong and the new Australian data is correct. The overall risk of birth defects in the general population is about 3%. If the risk is increased by in vitro fertilization (IVF) by 30-40% then the OVERALL risk amongst all in vitro fertilization (IVF) babies is between 4-5%. Stated another way, even if the risk is increased, the chances for baby without defects is over 95%!!. This means that in vitro fertilization (IVF) is still a fairly safe procedure.

I am not really ready to concede that the Australian study conclusions are correct, however. In order to settle the issue, we will need a very large study of in vitro fertilization (IVF) patients compared to infertility patients of the same age and same diagnoses who conceived without in vitro fertilization (IVF). This would be a very difficult study to do. In some cases, it would be impossible. For example a woman without fallopian tubes could not conceive without in vitro fertilization (IVF) so you could never have a valid comparison.

Bottom line? Everything we do in this world has some risk associated with it. In vitro fertilization (IVF) is no different. The question is whether the potential benefits outweigh those risks. This is not something that can be determined by a study. Every couple is going to have to make those decisions for themselves.