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SUBSTANCE EXPOSED BABIES

ORANGE COUNTY HEALTH CARE AGENCY

A two-phased multi-method assessment of prenatal substance use was conducted in Orange County (OC) from April to July 2007. The purpose of the study was to assess the prevalence rate of babies exposed to alcohol, tobacco or other drugs (ATOD) prior to birth. Nearly 2,600 pregnant women participated in the anonymous assessment, which included urinalysis of women giving birth at participating hospitals and self-report assessments of women presenting at prenatal care providers. The sample represented about 15% of the births that occurred county-wide during the study period. Results may help to inform program development including better prenatal education and screening in order to improve birth outcomes for babies born in OC.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY INCLUDE:

- The prevalence rate of ATOD use at any time during pregnancy was **15.1%** and **8.9%** during the past month of pregnancy based on self-report surveys.
- Based on self-reported use, alcohol was the most common substance used during pregnancy (**12.9%**), followed by tobacco (**4.9%**).
- The prevalence rate of illicit drug use at any time during pregnancy was **3.5%**. Because drug users are less likely to self-report, this rate was based on positive urinalysis (2.4%) plus the 1.1% who tested negatively but from chart review were known to have used drugs during pregnancy.
- The most common illicit drugs detected in urinalysis were opiates, amphetamines and marijuana.
- Non-Hispanic white women and women with higher education were more likely to use ATOD during pregnancy than women of other ethnicities and women with less education.
- The west and south regions of OC showed higher rates of alcohol and drug use during pregnancy than the north and central regions.
- Compared with non-users, substance users were more likely to:
 - Have a family member with a substance use problem.
 - Have initiated prenatal care later or to have received no prenatal care.
 - Be exposed to second-hand smoke during pregnancy.
 - Have babies born with shorter gestational age and lower birth weight.
- Pregnant women in OC reported much lower prevalence rates for alcohol and tobacco use than pregnant women nationwide. However, rates of illicit drug use were comparable to national rates and have not decreased over the past 15 years.

Based on a substance use prevalence rate of 15.1% found in the present study, an estimated 6,800 babies are born each year in OC exposed to alcohol, tobacco, and/or illicit drugs prior to birth and are at risk for developmental, physical, behavioral, and social disabilities.

Please go to www.ochalthinfo.com/seb to download or call (714) 834-3166 to request a copy of the full report.



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