

UC San Diego Experts Issue Warning About Cold Medications in Pregnancy

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Non-Profit Lists Top Remedy Tips For Moms Battling Colds This Holiday Season

Experts in pregnancy and breastfeeding health at the California Teratogen Information Service (CTIS) Pregnancy Health Information Line warn expectant moms about the potential dangers of common cold medicines during pregnancy. CTIS is a California non-profit housed at the University of California, San Diego that educates the public about exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

"Every year around this time, we get a significant number of calls from pregnant and breastfeeding women in California who are battling colds and are worried about which meds they can and can't take," said Christina Chambers, PhD, MPH, professor of pediatrics at UC San Diego and CTIS program director.

"The callers I've personally spoken to have valid concerns because there are certain ingredients in over-the-counter medications they need to watch out for that could be harmful to their developing babies," explained Sonia Alvarado, CTIS supervising counselor who takes calls through the service's toll-free hotline and online chat service. As a result of the potential for harm, Dr. Chambers and Alvarado have compiled a list of helpful tips for moms and moms-to-be battling colds this holiday season.

Top Five Cold Remedy Tips During Pregnancy:

- **Less is More.** Remember that "less is more," or rather, less is more recommendable when it comes to treating colds during pregnancy. Take only those medications that are needed for your specific symptoms. Many cold remedies have three to six ingredients, some of which you (and your developing baby) do not need. If your major complaint is a cough, for example, then avoid a combination drug that includes a nasal decongestant, an extra medication you can do without.
- **Oral Decongestion Alternatives.** While the majority of studies looking at oral decongestants during pregnancy are reassuring with first trimester use, it's still best to avoid them in the first trimester due to a possible very low risk for vascular issues in the

fetus. Pregnant women could consider saline drops or a short-term nasal spray decongestant alternative.

- **Herbal Ingredient Warning.** Watch out for herbal ingredients in many over-the-counter medications. Chances are they have not been studied in pregnancy.
- **Throat Lozenges and Vitamin Overload.** Throat lozenges contain mostly sugar, however, some may contain other ingredients such as zinc or vitamin C. When taking vitamin C, the recommended daily allowance during pregnancy is 80-100 mg per day and zinc is only 11 mg per day.
- **Cough Syrups and Alcohol.** Some cough syrups contain up to 10 percent alcohol. Get alcohol-free cough syrup. Your developing baby doesn't need the alcohol exposure in addition to the other medications.

In California, questions women or health care providers have about specific cold medications and other exposures during pregnancy or breastfeeding can be directed to CTIS Pregnancy Health Information Line counselors at 800-532-3749 or via instant message counseling at CTISpregnancy.org. Outside of California, please call CTIS' national affiliate, the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), at 866-626-6847.

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