AIMS For a better birth...

Campaigns update: Researchers leading surveillance of how Covid19 is affecting pregnant women and babies across the UK

To read or download this Journal in a magazine format on ISSUU, please click here

AIMS Journal, 2020, Vol 32, No 3

By AIMS Campaign Team

AIMS is pleased to see that a programme of data surveillance have been put in place by researchers, as part of the UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS), to understand the effects of COVID-19 on pregnant women and their infants[1].

UKOSS is perhaps one of the 'crown jewels' of the UK maternity system enabling research on rare conditions in pregnancy and childbirth across the whole of the UK, with excellent levels of reporting. UKOSS research is not just 'research for research's sake' - instead they focus on issues that are of concern for maternity care. As a joint initiative of the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit (NPEU) at the University of Oxford and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, they were able to launch this programme of surveillance very quickly and effectively.

We were very pleased to hear that we were not going to have to wait until the period of surveillance comes to an end (in March 2021) before the researchers shared their findings. Rather, the research team, led by the NPEU's Professor Marian Knight, is keen to report emerging findings, to ensure that the data is used in a way which is likely to improve outcomes (for example, by driving changes in professional guidelines) as soon as possible.

To this end, the study team published their initial findings in the BMJ[2] in May and offered three main conclusions:

1. Most pregnant women admitted to hospital with SARS-CoV-2 infection were in the late second or third trimester, supporting guidance for continued social distancing measures in later pregnancy.
2. Most had good outcomes, and transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to infants was uncommon.
3. The high proportion of women from black or minority ethnic groups admitted with infection needs urgent investigation and explanation.

The AIMS Campaign Steering group was particularly struck by one rapid response to the BMJ article. The response was written by Cassandra Yuill, a Medical Anthropologist who specialises in maternal health. She points out that, "the authors and the BMJ editors left out any reference to systematic racism and

inequality in their discussion of infection disparities among minorities". She states that the article suggests a "racialised view of biology that not only lacks a good evidence base but is also incredibly harmful".

AIMS shares these concerns and hopes that they will be addressed when further data and analysis is published. We are expecting a further publication in September 2020.

---

1 COVID-19 in Pregnancy, NPEU - www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/ukoss/current-surveillance/covid-19-in-pregnancy
2 Characteristics and outcomes of pregnant women admitted to hospital with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection in UK: national population based cohort study - www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m2107