

Specialists calls for greater focus on diabetes in pregnancy this National Diabetes Week

Friday, 11 July 2014

To mark National Diabetes Week 2014 (13-19 July), one of Australia's leading diabetes specialists has called for greater awareness about the importance of early screening for high-risk women in order to diagnose type 2 diabetes in pregnancy.

Principal research fellow with the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), Associate Professor Louise Maple-Brown pointed to the ongoing Pregnancy and Neonatal Diabetes Outcomes in Remote Australia (PANDORA) study as being critical to improving diabetes in pregnancy outcomes for mothers and babies.

The PANDORA study aims to assess rates and outcomes of diabetes in pregnancy (DIP) for mothers and their babies in the Northern Territory (NT). Available data suggest higher rates of diabetes in pregnancy in Indigenous than non-Indigenous mothers, with rates of type 2 diabetes in pregnancy over 10 times higher.

Associate Professor Maple-Brown said it was important for the health of both mother and baby that a mother's blood glucose is as good as possible during pregnancy.

"High blood glucose levels with type 2 diabetes in pregnancy are associated with increased risk at birth for the mother and newborn baby and can also increase the risk of your baby becoming overweight or having diabetes as a child, teenager or young adult.

"This is particularly important for the NT, as rates of diabetes are very high in Indigenous Territorians. Rates are also increasing across the whole population."

Associate Professor Maple-Brown said the study was critical as it would inform the design of future work for reducing the risk of future obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease in both the mothers and babies.

"Currently over 500 women have joined the study in which our research team follow up with mothers and their babies at 6 weeks, 6 months and 2 years," Associate Professor Maple-Brown said.

"Preliminary data from the cohort so far suggest that there are an increased number of Indigenous women with type 2 diabetes in pregnancy.

"The results of this collaborative study will contribute to policy and clinical practice guidelines of management of DIP and follow-up of mother and baby."

General Manager Primary Health Care, Top End Health Service, Dr Christine Connors said the study team had been surprised at the increased number of women diagnosed with diabetes in pregnancy, especially the number diagnosed early in their pregnancy.

"However, it is very important for women and their families to know that with the support of our health professionals women can achieve very good diabetes control," Dr Connors said.

"This is one of the most important times in a child's life in determining future risk of diabetes. We are pleased to be investing in the health of our next generation of Territorians, and are hoping to see reduced diabetes risk in the future."

The PANDORA study is a key component of the NT Diabetes in Pregnancy Partnership, a partnership between Menzies, NT Department of Health, Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT and Healthy Living NT. The NT DIP Partnership is funded by a National Health and Medical Research (NHMRC) Partnership Project Grant.

Read more about the PANDORA study at:

http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Projects/Diabetes/The_Northern_Territory_Diabetes_in_Pregnancy_Partnership_Project/

Media note:

Associate Professor Louise Maple-Brown is a principal research fellow at Menzies School of Health Research. View her profile at:

http://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Our_People/Researchers/Louise_Maple-Brown/

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Menzies Background

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia's only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 28-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern and Central Australia. We collaborate to create resources, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.