Pregnant Mums Asked To Stay Cool To Reduce Stillbirths And Shorter Pregnancies

Friday, December 16, 2011

http://www.asianscientist.com/health-medicine/pregnancy-mothers-ambient-temperature-preterm-birth-stillbirth-2011/

AsianScientist (Dec. 16, 2011) - Researchers at Queensland University of Technology's (QUT) Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation (IHBI) carried out a study that looked at the incidence of still and premature births in Brisbane over a four-year period from 2005.

A total of 101,870 births were recorded throughout the period and of these, 653 or 0.6 percent were stillbirths. The study found that increases in temperature increased the risk of stillbirth, especially in the earlier stages of pregnancy before 28 weeks.

> "Our estimated numbers were at 15°C there would be 353 stillbirths per 100,000 pregnancies, as compared with 610 stillbirths per 100,000 pregnancies at 23°C," said Associate Professor Adrian Barnett, who led the study.

They also found that increased temperatures shortened gestation times and thus, increased incidence of preterm birth. Preterm babies often have serious long-term health problems such as cerebral palsy and impaired vision and hearing.

Prof. Barnett's study recorded weekly temperature, humidity, and air pollution levels for each pregnancy. He said that the lowest risks were in the coolest weeks, and that warm temperatures with weekly means of 23°C were just as dangerous as the hottest weeks.

> "This could be because most pregnant women would be more conscious of trying to remain cool on the hottest days and would generally seek air conditioning," he said.

While other studies have looked at the relationship between temperature and pre-term births, this is the first to investigate the relationship between temperature and stillbirth.

With global temperatures rising, the study could have serious public health implications.

> "Pregnant women should protect themselves from overheating to reduce the likelihood of pre-term or stillbirths," Prof. Barnett cautioned.

The article can be found at: Strand LB et al. (2011) Maternal Exposure to Ambient Temperature and the Risks of preterm Birth and Stillbirth in Brisbane, Australia.

Source: Queensland University of Technology.
Disclaimer: This article does not necessarily reflect the views of AsianScientist or its staff.