NEWS

Covid-19: Half of pregnant women in UK hospitals are from ethnic minorities

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More than half of pregnant women recently admitted to a UK hospital with covid-19 infection were from black or other ethnic minority groups, a study in *The BMJ* has found.¹

Most women had good outcomes, and transmission of covid-19 to infants was uncommon, but the researchers said that the high proportion of women from black or minority ethnic groups admitted with infection “needs urgent investigation and explanation.”

There is evidence from other similar viral illnesses that pregnant women and their babies are at greater risk of severe illness and death. To better understand the risks associated with covid-19, researchers examined data from the UK Obstetric Surveillance System for pregnant women admitted to obstetric units in the UK with confirmed covid-19 infection between 1 March and 14 April 2020.

Over these six weeks, 427 pregnant women were admitted to hospital with covid-19, most of them in the late second or third trimester. More than half (56%) were from black or other ethnic minority groups (25% of women were Asian and 22% were black), 70% were overweight or obese, 40% were aged 35 or over, and a third had pre-existing conditions.

Some 41 (10%) of the women needed respiratory support in a critical care unit, and five (1%) women died (three as a direct result of complications of covid-19 and two from other causes). Twelve (5%) babies born to study mothers tested positive for covid-19, six of them within the first 12 hours after birth.

The high proportion of women from black and other minority ethnic groups admitted to hospital with covid-19 remained after excluding major urban centres from the analysis, which the authors said is of concern and should be investigated further.

The researchers point to some study limitations, such as incomplete outcome data for women who were discharged and some who were still in hospital. But they say these data suggest that most women do not have severe illness and that transmission of covid-19 to infants is uncommon. They also support guidance for continued social distancing measures in later pregnancy.

1 Knight M, Bunch K, Vousden N, et al. Characteristics and outcomes of pregnant women admitted to hospital with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection in UK. *BMJ* 2020;369:m2107.

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