COVID-19: OUTCOMES IN INFECTED PREGNANT WOMEN IN UK

Covid-19: UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS) study in context

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The recent UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS) study provides UK specific information about covid-19 in pregnancy.1 Women’s symptoms, risk factors for severe disease, and gestational age at presentation with covid-19, as well as increased preterm birth and caesarean delivery rates, are consistent with global data (systematic review and meta-analysis of 86 studies, including UKOSS, up to 8 June 2020).2 However, UKOSS has documented two findings that warrant emphasis.

Firstly, UKOSS data show an incidence of stillbirth (11.5 per 1000 total births) among women affected by covid-19 that is almost three times the national rate (4.1 per 1000 total births)3 when the standard denominator used is completed maternities (n=262). This is consistent with a stillbirth rate of 16.1 per 1000 total births in the 17 studies (2567 pregnancies) quantitatively synthesised in the most recent systematic review.2 The high rate may reflect acute illness, other direct implications of covid-19 after hospitalisation, or indirect effects of the pandemic related to changes in care seeking or maternity care.

Secondly, antiviral drugs were used less often in the UK (in 2% (9/247) of women compared with a median of 18%).4 One woman in the UKOSS study received lopinavir-ritonavir, so some pregnant women seem to have been enrolled in the RECOVERY trial launched in the UK on 24 March 2020. Admirably, this trial specified that pregnant women could be included.4 Steroids are an arm of RECOVERY and may be effective for covid-19,5 so it would be useful to know the course of covid-19 and respiratory disease in the 64 women who received antenatal corticosteroids for fetal lung maturation, and the pregnancy outcomes in the 47 who delivered. Azithromycin is also a RECOVERY intervention, so it would be useful to know if pregnant women received antimicrobial drugs.

Though not the purpose of UKOSS, any discussion of the implications of covid-19 in pregnancy should lead to the potential to prevent illness. Pregnant women are not eligible for the national covid-19 vaccination trials, although neither is studying live attenuated vaccines that are contraindicated in pregnancy (www.nihr.ac.uk/covid-studies). Pregnant women have a right to be enrolled in intervention trials,6 7 and covid-19 is a reminder of this.

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