Advisor Letter: Putting IVF risk in perspective

By ACSH Staff — April 26, 2012

Earlier this week, we discussed a new study that found that in vitro fertilization (IVF), along with another assisted reproductive technology called ICIS (intracytoplasmic sperm injection), was associated with a significant increase in a baby’s risk of birth defects. However, ACSH advisor Dr. Robert Brent, who is also Professor of Pediatrics, Radiology, and Pathology at Jefferson Medical College Research Department and Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Delaware, wrote to explain why the study shouldn’t be viewed as definitive:

The only proper control for in vitro fertilization studies is to perform the procedure in families that have not had a problem in conceiving. Of course no IRB at a responsible institution would approve such a study. Since you are dealing with ova and sperm from couples with infertility problems, you would not be surprised if the couples with infertility problems had a higher incidence of birth defects.

The second problem is that we know that twins and triplets have a higher incidence of birth defects, and therefore in vitro fertilization in some programs increased the incidence of multiple birth pregnancies. That could account for an increased incidence of birth defects.

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