Pregnancy safe for most heart disease patients

By ACSH Staff — September 14, 2012

Compared to their heart-healthy counterparts, pregnant women with heart disease have a higher risk of complications. However, a recent analysis [1] published in the *European Heart Journal* shows that the large majority of these women will have positive outcomes, both for themselves and their newborns.

For the study, a team of researchers from Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam analyzed data on over 1,300 pregnant women, sourced from 28 countries between 2007 and 2011. All of the patients suffered from either valvular heart disease, congenital heart disease, ischemic heart disease, or cardiomyopathies.

Most of the women had early stage heart disease, yet the study results still showed that, compared to pregnant women without heart disease, this group had higher rates of preterm birth, fetal death, and maternal mortality. However, the rates of such occurrences themselves actually remained low. That is, researchers found that pregnant women with heart disease had a 1 percent mortality rate, compared to 0.007 percent among healthy women. The risk was particularly intensified in women with cardiomyopathy and those living in developing countries.

Overall, however, the results suggested that, with adequate counseling and optimal care (both pre-conception and during pregnancy), women with heart disease should not be deterred from becoming pregnant.

On the whole this is good news, says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. But women suffering from heart disease should be aware that they are at risk of more complications. Pregnancy is in itself a risk, and unfortunately there's no way around that. But if a women with heart disease chooses to get pregnant, it is very important for her to have the best possible care and have any remediable conditions dealt with ahead of time including valve replacement, if indicated.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom seconds that. According to this study, maternal mortality occurred at a rate of 1 percent among this cohort of 1,300 women. That's 13 women not an insignificant number, he says. In fact, it means that there is a 130-fold increased risk of death.