

Backgrounder on Birth

May 1, 2008

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A Baby Boom

According to a recent AP article, the United States seems to be experiencing a baby boom, reporting the largest number of children born in 45 years.

- The nearly 4.3 million births in 2006 were mostly due to a bigger population and includes not only hispanics but nearly every race, including whites too.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5il3MRchwbfmuBgzYUPgNwvcBVK1wD8U6OU100>

“An Associated Press review of birth numbers dating to 1909 found the total number of U.S. births was the highest since 1961, near the end of the baby boom. An examination of global data also shows that the United States has a higher fertility rate than every country in continental Europe, as well as Australia, Canada and Japan. Fertility levels in those countries have been lower than the U.S. rate for several years, although some are on the rise, most notably in France.”

- The number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime has reached 2.1. According to the AP article, that is the "magic number" required for a population to replace itself. The 2006 fertility rate of 2.1 children is the highest level since 1971.
- According to the CDC: Total births jumped 3 percent in 2006: “the largest single-year increase since 1989.”

The number of Elective Caesarean Births is Growing

Even with documented scientific risks (see below), the rate of Caesareans is increasing:

- The CDC reports that in 2006, C-sections accounted for 31.1 percent of births nationwide, a 50 percent increase over the past 10 years. They report that the United States has one the highest rates of Caesareans—and of infant mortality.
- Natural birth, which means without drugs or interventions, whether at home or in a hospital, is rare, even though it is safer for the mother and child (see risks below).
- According to the March of Dimes, late preterm delivery (34 to 36 weeks) increased from 7.3 percent to 8.9 percent between 1990 and 2004 in the United States.

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Women are also opting not to take Lamaze classes

According to a recent study, attendance at Lamaze classes, which teach women how to manage labor pain without drugs, dropped 14 percent between 2000 and 2005.

- According to research, home births do not have higher risk rates than hospital births:

Risks of Caesarean Births

Like most major surgeries, there are several risk factors:

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/bmj.39363.706956.55v1?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=maternal+neonatal+caesarean&sea>

In a study published in October's ***British Medical Journal***:

- Mothers who had a Caesarean were also more likely to need blood transfusions and stay in the hospital more than a week after delivery.
- Infants from C-sections are more likely to have a low birth weight—double that of vaginal births
- The risk of death for infants delivered via C-section was higher
- Infants were more likely to have respiratory problems.

According to another study published in the journal ***Birth***:

- Caesareans impede the process of clearing liquid from the infant's lungs, preparing the baby to breathe outside the womb, which may explain why there are more respiratory problems.

The Use of Pitocin (to rush labor)

The drug can cause immediate painful contractions, which doctors tend to treat with an epidural painkiller. The epidural can sometimes lead to more drugs, fetal stress and the doctor's recommendation of a Caesarean.

http://www.wisconsinmedicalsociety.org/WMS/publications/wmj/issues/wmj_v105n2/Mazzone.pdf

- During the 1980s, Dr. Roberto Caldreyo-Barcia, a former president of the International Federation of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and a renowned researcher into the effects of obstetrical interventions commented, "Pitocin is the most abused drug in the world today." He claimed its use was medically necessary in only about 3% of labors, yet estimates of its use range from 12% to 60%. <http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2006/03/11.html>

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Additional Risks

- Uterine Rupture: The authors of this study urge careful administration of the lowest possible amount of pitocin in their conclusion in order to avoid the contractions that can cause uterine rupture, and to insist that once the drip is started, the mother should never be left alone.
- “Aside from their risks of uterine rupture and decreased oxygen supply to the baby, the increased pain for the mother of the pitocin-induced contractions, which are often double-peaked and back-to-back with little or no rest time in between (a function of the amount of the pitocin being administered), is likely to increase her stress and anxiety levels as well, and to cause her to repeatedly request increased pain medication.”

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