

Planning for a cohort study to investigate the impact and management of influenza in pregnancy in a future pandemic

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Declared competing interests of authors: Peter Brocklehurst reports personal fees from Oxford Analytica; grants from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence outside the submitted work; and that he is chairperson of the National Institute for Health Research Health Technology Assessment Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health Panel (MNCH).

Published March 2015

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr03060

Plain English summary

Impact and management of influenza in pregnancy

Health Services and Delivery Research 2015; Vol. 3: No. 6

DOI: 10.3310/hsdr03060

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Plain English summary

Pregnant women have an increased chance of developing infections and becoming seriously ill; this includes being more likely to catch influenza (flu). During the 'swine flu' pandemic of 2009–10 we carried out a study to investigate the effect of flu on pregnant women using a system called the UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS). We set up UKOSS in 2005 to study serious rare conditions affecting pregnant women, so, when 'swine flu' was declared as a pandemic, we rapidly set in place a study to look at its effects in pregnancy. We found that pregnant women had an increased risk of becoming severely ill and were also more likely to have a stillborn or premature baby. The results from the study were used to make changes to the treatment offered to pregnant women infected with 'swine flu' and also led to the recommendation that all pregnant women should receive vaccination against seasonal flu routinely – this is the flu that occurs every year in winter time. We know that, even though there is not a flu pandemic currently, a small number of pregnant women have nevertheless died from seasonal flu.

Using our experience from the 'swine flu' pandemic we have set everything in place so that if there is another flu pandemic we can rapidly activate a new UKOSS study to investigate what happens. This will provide the necessary information, once again, to enable treatment and vaccination provided during pregnancy to be tailored to the particular needs of pregnant women.

Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)

ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the Health Services and Delivery Research programme as project number 11/46/12. The contractual start date was in June 2012. The report detailing the set up phase and initial outcomes began editorial review in December 2014 and was accepted for publication in February 2015. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The *Health Services and Delivery Research* editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report. Should the study progress further, the full report will be published in the *Health Services and Delivery Research* journal.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

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