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Extended Research Article

Accuracy and clinical effectiveness of fetal growth monitoring strategies for the prediction of small for gestational age at birth: a systematic review and meta-analysis

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

An independent report on maternity safety investigations conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic identified 11 cases of stillborn infants who were smaller than would be usual for the number of weeks of pregnancy. Being smaller than would be usual for the number of weeks of pregnancy has been linked to an increased risk of stillbirth. In 8 of the 11 cases, this smallness was not detected until birth.

This finding raised concerns about the way in which babies' growth is checked during pregnancy.

This research has systematically searched the published literature to identify research studies about the methods used to check babies' growth during pregnancy. Our report summarises the evidence about how good current measurement methods are at finding when babies are smaller than would be usual for the number of weeks of pregnancy, how are the results of these measurements used (e.g. to decide that a baby needs to be delivered early) and how does this affect how well babies and mothers do after delivery.

There is a lack of evidence to link the increased detection of small babies before birth to reductions in stillbirths and improved outcomes for babies, but there is evidence that an increased detection may lead to more induction of labour and increased numbers of assisted and caesarean births. There is a lack of evidence to determine whether current United Kingdom clinical guidance has been effective in reducing stillbirths and improving outcomes for babies. Evidence suggests that ultrasound during the third trimester, to measure the baby and estimate weight, is the method likely to detect most small babies before birth.

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This article

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