

Study finds no harm for newborns whose mothers were treated with magnesium sulphate during pregnancy

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A team led by Adelaide-based researchers has taken an important step towards validating the safety of intravenous magnesium sulphate as a treatment during pregnancy.

Lead author Emily Shepherd, a Ph.D. candidate with the University of Adelaide and SAHMRI Women & Kids theme, says these findings will give comfort to parents and doctors amid widespread and increasing use of magnesium sulphate in obstetric practice.

"Until now there has been speculation this beneficial treatment could unintentionally harm the [unborn child](#), but it's been unclear either way," Mrs Shepherd says.

"Our team undertook a [systematic review](#) that analyzed almost 200 studies, including 40 randomized trials, and found no clear differences in harm for newborns whose mothers were treated with magnesium sulphate during pregnancy and those whose mothers received no treatment or a

placebo."

The findings were published today in *PLOS Medicine*.

Magnesium sulphate has a long history of use for women with pre-eclampsia or eclampsia. In the past decade it has been introduced as a treatment for [pregnant women](#) who are likely to have a very [preterm birth](#) to reduce the chances of their baby developing [cerebral palsy](#).

"Around 3500 births are very premature, at less than 30 completed weeks of pregnancy, every year in Australia," Mrs Shepherd says.

"Our findings support the continued use of magnesium sulphate as a safe treatment for these women, as well as for pregnant women suffering from pre-eclampsia or eclampsia."

Senior author Professor Caroline Crowther's team is continuing to research use of magnesium sulphate during pregnancy, including whether [magnesium sulphate](#) can be effective for cerebral palsy prevention for later preterm births up to 34 completed weeks of pregnancy.

"We are extremely grateful to the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Australia who has supported this important work," Professor Crowther said.

More information: Emily Shepherd et al. Antenatal magnesium sulphate and adverse neonatal outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *PLOS Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1002988](#)

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