

# Antibiotics found to pose risk of miscarriage in early pregnancy

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By Henry Bodkin

ANTIBIOTICS can increase the risk of miscarriage if taken during early pregnancy, a study suggests.

A review involving more than 95,000 women has found five common classes of the drug were associated with an increased risk, while two others were shown to be safe.

Experts say the major risk highlighted by the study is for women prescribed antibiotics who do not yet know they are pregnant, as British doctors are generally cautious in prescribing the medicines when they know conception has occurred.

Published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, the investigation found a heightened chance of miscarriage was associated with commonly used antibiotics known as macrolides, quinolones, tetracyclines, sulfonamides and metronidazole.

But the scientists also found erythromycin and nitrofurantoin, often used

to treat urinary tract infections in pregnant women, were not associated with an increased risk.

Dr Anick Bérard, from the faculty of pharmacy at the University of Montreal, said: "Infections are prevalent during pregnancy.

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## 50pc

The increased risk to women using certain antibiotics, given that about one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage

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"Although antibiotic use to treat infections has been linked to a decreased risk of prematurity and low birth weight in other studies, our investigation shows that certain types of antibiotics are increasing the risk of spontaneous abortion, with a 60 per cent to two-fold increase."

Roughly one in four pregnancies

ends in miscarriage, meaning women prescribed some of the antibiotics flagged in the study could be raising their risk to a 50 per cent chance.

"Given that the baseline risk of spontaneous abortion can go as high as 30 per cent, this is significant," said Dr Bérard. "Nevertheless, the increased risk was not seen for all antibiotics, which is reassuring for users."

Dr Bérard and her team looked at data from the Quebec Pregnancy Cohort between 1998 and 2009, comparing 8,702 miscarriages with 87,020 births in the control group. The women were between 15 and 45 years old.

The Miscarriage Association said the scale and quality of the study made it "a really important piece of research".

Dr Nicola Davies, a GP and former trustee of the association, said: "The main risk this research throws up is for those women who don't know they are pregnant. Most of these drugs are drugs you wouldn't prescribe if you knew a woman was pregnant."