

# Mothers were not warned of epilepsy drug's risks

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More than two thirds of women with epilepsy who take a drug that can cause birth defects are not warned about its risks, new research claims.

Campaigners said that thousands of babies would continue to be born with disabilities unless authorities stepped up efforts to educate the young women.

Sodium valproate, also known as Epilim, carries a 10 per cent risk of causing physical abnormalities in unborn babies and a 40 per cent risk of developing problems such as autism.

About 20,000 babies in Britain are believed to have been left with disabilities since its introduction in the 1970s.

For some women with epilepsy, sodium valproate is the only drug that can control their seizures. It is also used to treat migraine or bipolar disorder.

The European Medicines Agency is examining whether warnings about the risks during pregnancy are strong enough. Women whose children have been harmed are due to give evidence to the regulator in London next week.

A survey by three charities — Epilepsy Society, Epilepsy Action and Young Epilepsy — found that of 475 women and girls younger than 50 taking the drug, 68 per cent had not been told of the dangers.

Clare Pelham, chief executive of the Epilepsy Society, said: "Thousands of babies have been born with disabilities whose mothers were unaware of the risks."

The charity is calling on Jeremy Hunt, the health secretary, to prevent family doctors issuing repeat prescriptions to women for more than a year without a face-to-face consultation.

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