# Study Shows Epidurals in Labour Can Reduce Severe Complications by 35%



A recent study involving over half a million women in the United Kingdom found that epidurals during labor can reduce the risk of severe complications by 35%. The study, led by the University of Glasgow and the University of Bristol, analyzed the medical records of 567,216 women who gave birth vaginally or by unplanned caesarean section in Scottish NHS hospitals from 2007 to 2019.

Of these women, 125,024 received an epidural, a type of anesthetic administered through an injection in the back to block pain. The research identified significant reductions in the risk of complications such as heart attacks, sepsis, and other life-threatening conditions during childbirth and in the weeks following labor among those who received an epidural.

The findings were published in The BMJ, and the researchers suggest expanding access to epidurals could improve maternal health, particularly for women who are at higher medical risk or deliver prematurely. Lead author Professor Rachel Kearns emphasized the necessity of ensuring access to epidurals for the most vulnerable populations.

The study also aligns with a broader conversation about the state of maternity services in the UK, highlighted by a recent Parliamentary inquiry and an Oxford-led MBRRACE-UK report, both pointing to persistent issues and the need for systemic improvements. Instances of severe complications during childbirth almost doubled from 2009 to 2018, largely due to factors such as older maternal age and rising obesity rates.

The research underscores the potential of epidurals to mitigate these risks, providing a crucial piece of evidence for healthcare policy makers to consider in efforts to enhance maternal health outcomes.