



# ECHO

Environmental influences  
on Child Health Outcomes

A program supported by the NIH

## Study Summary

### ***Antidepressant use during pregnancy does not affect a child's risk for autism-related traits***

*Authors: Patricia Brennan, et al.*

#### Who sponsored this study?

This research was supported by the Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes (ECHO) Program, Office of The Director, National Institutes of Health.

#### Why was this study needed?

Previous studies have reported mixed findings on the relationship between prenatal antidepressant use and child autism. Pregnant people and the physicians that treat them need more data to inform their decisions about whether to take certain medications during pregnancy.

#### Who was involved?

This study included 3,129 mothers and their children enrolled in ECHO cohorts across the United States. Participants provided data on prenatal exposure to antidepressants as well as measures of autism-related traits collected when the child was between 1 and 12 years of age. About 5% of the participating mothers took antidepressants during pregnancy.

#### What happened during the study?

The researchers used medical records and maternal self-reports to determine what medicines mothers used during pregnancy. Mothers reported on whether their child received an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis and also completed rating scales about their child's behavior, including social, language, and other traits related to autism.

#### What were the study results?

This study found that prenatal use of antidepressants, including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), did not increase a child's risk for ASD or related traits.

Footnote: Results reported here are for a single study. Other or future studies may provide new information or different results. You should not make changes to your health without first consulting your healthcare professional.

#### Impact

Pregnant people who are diagnosed with depression must weigh a number of risks when making decisions about treatments. Sometimes medical providers may recommend treatment with

antidepressants. This study suggests that maternal use of antidepressants, including SSRIs, during pregnancy does not increase a child's risk for autism-related traits. This information can be valuable in helping pregnant people and their physicians decide whether antidepressant treatment is right for them.

### What happens next?

Future studies might consider whether the dose or timing of antidepressant use during pregnancy changes its effect on child health outcomes.

### Where can I learn more?

Access the full journal article, titled "Prenatal Antidepressant Exposures and Autism Spectrum Disorder or Traits: A Retrospective, Multi-Cohort Study," in [Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology](#).

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