Assisted reproductive technology may be linked to increased risk of birth defects

The AP (5/7, Marchione) reports, "Test-tube babies have higher rates of birth defects, and doctors have long wondered whether the cause is certain fertility treatments or infertility itself. A large new study" published the New England Journal of Medicine "suggests that both may play a role."

The Los Angeles Tines (5/5, Kaplan) "Booster Shots" blog reported, "The study is based on data from more than 300,000 births in the state of South Australia (population 1.6 million) between 1986 and 2002, including 6,163 that came about with the help of some form of assisted reproductive technology (ART).

On its website, ABC Nes (5/6, Salahi) reported, "Eight percent of the babies conceived through assistance were born with birth defects such as heart, genital, kidney, lung and muscle problems, compared to nearly six percent of babies who were conceived naturally, the study found. Those conceived through fertility assistance were also more likely to have cerebral palsy."

The CNN (5/5, Gardner) "The Chart" blog reported, however, that "virtually all of the increased risk associated with IVF could be attributed to the health and demographic profile of the mother, including her age, body mass index, socioeconomic status, and any health conditions (such as diabetes) she may have experienced before or during pregnancy." In fact, "the direct influence of IVF on the risk of birth defects appears to be 'very modest,' says lead researcher Michael J. Davies, PhD."

WebMD (5/6, Goodman) reported, "Birth defects associated with ICSI [intracytoplasmic sperm injection], however, remained 55% higher than the rates seen in fertile couples even after researchers took into account underlying factors associated with birth."

MedPage Today (5/6, Neale) reported that in addition to its publication in NEJM, the study was "presented at the World Congress on Building Consensus in Gynecology, Infertility, and Perinatology in Barcelona."

Source: AMA Medical Rounds, May 17, 2012