

Pregnancy test may cause palate defects

By SHAUN McILRAITH,
Medical Correspondent

A Perth doctor has associated a congenital abnormality, cleft lip and palate, with the child's mother having one kind of pregnancy test.

In 10 per cent of cases of the abnormality in Western Australia between 1963 and 1974, the mother had had a pregnancy test involving taking a combined progestogen-oestrogen hormonal drug, he says.

In 22 of the 222 cases of

Doctor's research

cleft lip and palate during the period, the mother had taken the pregnancy test between the fifth and eighth weeks of gestation.

Dr W. F. Brogan, of Princess Margaret Hospital for Children in Perth, reports the finding in a letter to the Medical Journal of Australia.

He says that because most cases of cleft lip and palate are thought to be due to the

interaction of heredity and environment, it is important to try to identify the environmental factors.

Because the oral pregnancy tests in the West Australian cases were usually administered at the most sensitive stage of the embryo's development, Dr Brogan considers they are an unwarranted risk.

He points out that other pregnancy tests are available which do not require the administration of any drug.

Some of the tests in his series, he suggests, may have been made in the hope of producing miscarriage — an obvious misuse of the drug.

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SLOWLY MORNING
HERALD

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Govt acts on baby test pill

MELBOURNE, Monday. — The Federal Government has asked for a complete withdrawal of pregnancy test pills. Research indicates the pills are contributing to defects in babies.

It was reported on Saturday that research had shown oral pregnancy tests were associated with cleft lips and palates. The Federal Health Department is cancelling import licences for the pills.

The three Australian companies marketing the pills have been asked to halt all sales.

The action follows a recommendation from the Federal Drug Evaluation Committee.

A Health Department spokesman said today: "We have written to three companies that market hormonal pregnancy testing tablets.

"The companies are being asked to withdraw the tablets from sale.

"All import licences have been cancelled.

"The measures are designed to have immediate effect.

"The action is on the basis of questionable safety."

Other methods

The Drug Evaluation Committee chairman, Dr Stanley Goulston, said the recommendation to stop marketing followed receipt of detailed research material.

Alternatively pregnancy tests not involving hormonal tablets were readily available, he said.

The most common hormonal pregnancy test involves the use of two pills on consecutive days. Bleeding normally follows if the patient is not pregnant.

Research has shown that if the woman is pregnant, the hormone can interrupt foetus formation, so causing abnormalities.

Much of the research information has come through world health bodies but some recent work has been done by Dr W. F. Progan at Perth's Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

He reported in a letter to the Medical Journal of Australia that the hormonal pills could cause palate defects.

Action of test pill danger

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MELBOURNE. — The Federal Government has ordered the complete withdrawal from sale of pregnancy testing pills.

Research indicates that the pills have contributed to deformities in babies.

The Health Department is cancelling import licences and the three Australian companies marketing them have been told to halt sales.

A Brisbane gynaecologist last night said many doctors had dropped the form of pregnancy testing some years ago.

He was not aware of any abnormalities attributed to it in Queensland.

"It is not normally used because most doctors consider it was to give a pregnant woman as few drugs as possible," he said.

The problem with withdrawal was that it caused tremendous alarm when the drug was only suspected of being responsible.

Immediate

The Government action follows a recommendation from the Federal Drug Evaluation Committee.

A Federal Health Department spokesman said yesterday: "We have written to three companies that market hormonal pregnancy testing tablets.

"The companies are being asked to withdraw the tablets from sale. The measures are designed to have immediate effect. The action is on the basis of questionable safety."

The Drug Evaluation Committee chairman, (Dr. Stanley Goulston) said the recommendation to stop Australian marketing followed receipt of detailed research into

bodies, but some recent work was done by a doctor at Perth's Princess Margaret Hospital for Children.

This doctor reported late last week that the hormonal pills could cause testis defects.

Worried

Some doctors are worried that a second type of pill — for birth control — is causing male features in female babies.

The Australian College of Gynaecologists is worried that young girls could become infertile.

The college president, Mr. Ian McDonald, said yesterday: "Hormonal testing has been used quite extensively."

On the birth control pill, Mr. McDonald added that indications were emerging that a popular component of many such pills could cause a type of male genital characteristic in females.

The component believed to be causing the problem is 19-nortestosterone.

Mr. McDonald said it appeared to cause difficulty when a woman missed taking the pill for a day or two and then took a double dose.

If she conceived during the missed time, studies indicated that the component could cause the male characteristics.

Gynaecologists were trying to have 19-nortestosterone removed from the pill, Mr. McDonald said.

The Brisbane gynaecologist said 19-nortestosterone had been suspect for some years.

The incidence of male genital characteristics was very low.

It could occur because some women continued through a course of the pill, unaware that they had conceived.

Taking the pill for a day or two, then took a double dose.

Gynaecologists are worried that the baby girls could eventually prove to be infertile.

PREGNANCY PILL BANNED — FEAR OF DEFORMITY

By MICHAEL WILKINSON

THE Federal Government has ordered the complete withdrawal of a pregnancy testing pill.

Research indicates the pill is contributing to deformed babies.

And leading doctors are worried that a second type of pill — for birth control — is causing male features in female babies.

The Australian College of Gynaecologists is worried that the baby girls could eventually prove to be infertile.

Use of hormonal testing varies among doctors — but estimates of use range from 15 to 40 per cent of all tests for pregnancy.

"The companies are being asked to withdraw the tablets from sale and all import licences have been cancelled," a Federal Health Department spokesman said yesterday.

"The measures are designed to have immediate effect."

The Government action follows a recommendation from the Federal Drug Evaluation Committee.

Research:

warning

The committee's chairman, Dr Stanley Goulston, said the recommendation to stop Australian marketing followed the receipt of detailed research material.

Dr Goulston said other pregnancy tests, not involving hormonal tablets, were readily available.

The president of the Australian College of Gynaecologists, Mr Ian McDonald, said a popular component of many birth control pills was now thought to cause a type of male characteristic in females.

The component believed to be causing the problem is 19-nortestosterone.

Mr McDonald said it appeared to malfunction when a woman missed taking the pill for a day.

Hormone drugs under scrutiny

WITHDRAWN CHEMICAL TESTS NAMED

MELBOURNE, Tuesday. — Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in Australia has begun a national investigation into the effects of drugs on unborn children.

The investigation, to cover about 80 per cent of all Australian births, is expected to last for many years. All drugs, including those related to sex hormones, will come under close scrutiny and progress reports will be published from time to time.

A controlled survey in New York last year showed that children were more likely to be born with limb deformities if their mothers had been exposed to hormonal pregnancy tests, or had "breakthrough" pregnancies while on oral contraceptives.

The college's Australian president, Mr I. A. McDonald, said he did not think hormone pregnancy test pills or contraceptives containing 19-norethisterone should be taken off the market until long-term investigations had shown a definite link to deformities.

"Our earliest impressions are that the link between pregnancy hormone test pills and congenital abnormalities is very minor," he said.

CANBERRA, Tuesday. — A number of hormone pregnancy-testing preparations which the Federal Government has ordered withdrawn were named today by the Minister for Health, Dr Everingham.

They are Duogynon, Duogynon Simplex, Duogynon Oral (Schering Pty Ltd), Amenorone Forte (Roussel Pharmaceutical Pty Ltd) and Secordyl (Allen and Hanbury's).

Dr Everingham said the Australian Drug Evaluation Committee had recommended that systemic hormonal formulations for pregnancy testing be withdrawn because of their questionable safety, and the fact that there were adequate and reliable methods available which did not involve the

administration of hormones.

Dr Everingham said that apart from the pregnancy-testing products withdrawn there were a number of other hormonal preparations available in Australia which also could be used for pregnancy testing.

The department would require that product literature for these preparations contain a specific warning that they not be used for pregnancy testing.

Although a number of contraceptive pills contained similar substances, they were used in much lower doses and were administered to prevent pregnancy.

Thus women on the pill had no cause for worry if they complied with recommended instructions. But multiple doses when routine doses were missed should be avoided.