



International Clearinghouse for Birth Defects Surveillance and Research Monthly Newsletter

October 2020

Issue 2020-10

UPDATE ON 2020 ICBDSR ANNUAL MEETING

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 47th ICBDSR Annual Meeting has been postponed to **October 10-13, 2021**. The meeting venue remains the Relais Bellaria Hotel & Congressi in Bologna (Italy). Updates on the annual meeting will be posted on the [ICBDSR website](#).

NEWS AND UPDATE ON COVID-19

COVID-19 is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation:

- Get the full database of COVID-19 resources from WHO: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.
- Get the latest public health information from CDC: <https://www.coronavirus.gov>.
- Get the latest research from NIH: <https://www.nih.gov/coronavirus>.
- Find SARS-CoV-2 literature, sequence, and clinical content: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sars-cov-2/>.

ICBD corner

*In this section, the **International Centre on Birth Defects (ICBD)**, Headquarter Centre of the ICBDSR, shares some of its work that can be of interest to the readers.*

For the last year, at ICBD we have been busy working with CDC and WHO to develop and update a new **birth defect surveillance toolkit**. Compared to the original version (still available on the WHO website, (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564762>), the new toolkit (soon to be put online) represents an extensive and exciting revision, aimed at staff in hospitals and birth centers and also central program managers. A few highlights:

- The revised toolkit now includes the *Manual for Programme Managers* and *Quick Reference Handbook*
- Doubled the number of birth defects, including internal anomalies, such as congenital heart defects and selected congenital infections
- *The Manual for Programme Managers* now also includes a sizeable chapter on quality assessment and improvement in birth defects surveillance.
- The *Quick Reference Handbook* has been specifically designed to help healthcare workers and abstractors identify, describe, and report eligible conditions clearly and efficiently; as such, the Handbook includes several new tools –images, diagrams, description checklists, and clinical pearls.
- Both the Manual and the Handbook can be very useful not only for field work but also for training.

The current plan is to **unveil the new toolkit in a joint WHO-CDC-ICBDSR webinar** in December 2020. The exact time and date will be circulated as soon as it is definitive. As members of the ICBDSR, if you would like a preview and discuss how the toolkit can help your program, do let us know and we will plan an ad-hoc event.

What's Going on Regarding Birth Defects: initiatives and announcements

All readers are kindly invited to contribute to this section of the Newsletter, sending their suggestions to centre@icbdsr.org by the 1st Friday of the month.

Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) on the UN General Assembly Agenda

NCDs featured prominently in the [UN General Assembly's resolution 74/306](#), adopted on 11 September 2020, concerning the 'comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic'. The resolution recognizes the interplay between COVID-19 and NCDs, and explicitly:

- 'Calls upon Member States to further strengthen efforts to address NCDs as part of universal health coverage, recognizing that people living with non-communicable diseases are at a higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 symptoms and are among the most impacted by the pandemic' (Article 9).
- 'Encourages Member States to address mental health in their response to and recovery from the pandemic by ensuring widespread availability of emergency mental health and psychosocial support' (Article 10).
- 'Calls upon Member States and other stakeholders to prevent, monitor and address the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on older persons, including the particular risks that they face in accessing social protection and health services' (Article 23).
- 'Calls upon Member States and other stakeholders to include persons with disabilities in all stages of policymaking and decision-making related to COVID-19 response and recovery, as well to eliminate barriers and discrimination against persons with disabilities' (Article 24).

WHO Spotlight Webinars for NCD Directors

WHO informs national directors and program managers responsible for NCDs in Ministries of Health that WHO is organizing a series of five webinars on how to address NCDs within the context of COVID-19. You can sign up and find out more information [here](#).

What's Going on Regarding Birth Defects: a selection from the recent literature, and recommendations from readers

All readers are kindly invited to contribute to this section of the Newsletter, sending their suggestions to centre@icbdsr.org by the 1st Friday of the month

A Selection from the Recent Literature

1. COVID and Birth Defects

Perspectives on challenges and opportunities for birth defects surveillance programs during and after the COVID-19 era. Ludorf KL, Salemi JL, Kirby RS, Tanner JP, Agopian AJ. Birth Defects Res. 2020 Aug;112(14):1039-1042. doi: 10.1002/bdr2.1710. Epub 2020 May 16.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32415915/>

Surveillance program and COVID-19 epidemic are intertwined in different ways. Surveillance could help assess the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on congenital anomalies and adverse pregnancy outcomes (although how this might happen deserves an in-depth discussion). However, the epidemic itself is disrupting many healthcare activities, and in doing so raises many challenges to surveillance operations. The authors discuss these issues in a recent publication in Birth Defect Research.

What is the situation in your area ? How are you facing these challenges ?

2. Birth Defects in less known parts of the world.

Prevalence and associated factors of birth defects among newborns in sub-Saharan African countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Adane F, Afework M, Seyoum G, Gebrie A. Pan Afr Med J. 2020 May 14;36:19. doi: 10.11604/pamj.2020.36.19.19411. eCollection 2020. PMID: 32774596.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32774596/>

In this review, authors from two academic institutions in Ethiopia survey the literature for studies on birth defects in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on 25 reports. Leaving aside the specific findings of the meta-analysis, the review highlights the paucity of information from this important area of the world, as well as the heterogeneity of methods and approaches. Health surveillance of birth defects can support better prevention and care in low and middle resource.

If you know of programs not part of the Clearinghouse that could benefit from the tools and skills of ICBD, please consider putting ICBD in contact with these programs.

3. Updates on specific risk factors

Maternal Use of Specific Antidepressant Medications During Early Pregnancy and the Risk of Selected Birth Defects. Anderson KN, Lind JN, Simeone RM, Bobo WV, Mitchell AA, Riehle-Colarusso T, Polen KN, Reefhuis J. JAMA Psychiatry 2020 Aug ; e202453. doi: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.2453. Online ahead of print. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32777011/>

In this report from the NBDPS case-control study in the US, the authors revisit the well-known and at times controversial question of association between antidepressants and birth defects. The large sample size allowed for the examination of specific birth defects, including several cardiac defects. Some novel findings were noted for Venflaxine. Of interest is the authors' efforts to reduce or account for confounding, including confounding by indication. Because of the wide use of these medications in many countries of ICBD members, this study may be of interest to ICBD members and beyond.

Recommendations from readers

Lowry RB, Bedard T, Crawford S, Grevers X, Bernier FP, Thomas MA. [Prevalence rates study of selected isolated non-Mendelian congenital anomalies in the Hutterite population of Alberta, 1980-2016.](#) Am J Med Genet A. 2020 Sep 7:e61834. doi: 10.1002/ajmg.a.61834. Online ahead of print. PMID: 32893972 . PDF available upon request at centre@icbdsr.org

Kar, A., Radhakrishnan, B., Girase, T., Ujagare, D., & Patil, A. (2020). [Community-Based Screening and Early Intervention for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities: Lessons from the RBSK Programme in India.](#) Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development, 31(1), 30-46.

Jorieke E H Bergman, Katharina Löhner, Corry K van der Sluis, Patrick Rump, Hermien E K de Walle. [Etiological diagnosis in limb reduction defects and the number of affected limbs: A population-based study in the Northern Netherlands.](#) Am J Med Genet A. 2020 Sep 21. doi: 10.1002/ajmg.a.61875. Online ahead of print.

Romy van de Putte, Hermien E. K. de Walle, Kirsten J. M. van Hooijdonk, Ivo de Blaauw, Carlo L. M. Marcelis, Arno van Heijst, Jacques C. Giltay, Kirsten Y. Renkema, Paul M. A. Broens, Erwin Brosens, Cornelius E. J. Sloots, Jorieke E. H. Bergman, Nel Roeleveld, Iris A. L. M. van Rooij. [Maternal risk associated with the VACTERL association: A case-control study.](#) Birth Defects Res. Published as early view on 2020 July 23.

Zhao, D., Guo, L., Zhang, R. Zhu., Q. Wang, H., Liu, R., Yan, H., Dang, S. [Risk of congenital heart disease due to exposure to common electrical appliances during early pregnancy: a case-control study.](#) Environ Sci Pollut Res (2020).



World Birth Defects Day – WBDD, March 3

It's never too early to apply to be a 2021 **WBDD Partner Organization**, by completing the online application form on the WBDD website <https://www.worldbirthdefectsday.org/application-form/>.

Follow @worldbdday on Twitter <https://twitter.com/WorldBDDay> and Instagram worldbdday <https://www.instagram.com/worldbdday/>

Join WBDD page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WBDDay/>
Visit WBDD website <https://www.worldbirthdefectsday.org/>

News from the ICBDSR Executive Committee

The ICBDSR Collaborative paper on Mortality among children with Omphalocele has been published in Birth Defects Research:

Nembhard WN, Bergman JEH, Politis MD, Arteaga-Vázquez J, Bermejo-Sánchez E, Canfield MA, Cragan JD, Dastgiri S, de Walle HEK, Feldkamp ML, Nance A, Gatt M, Groisman B, Hurtado-Villa P, Kallén K, Landau D, Lelong N, Lopez-Camelo J, Martinez L, Morgan M, Pierini A, Rissmann A, Šípek A, Szabova E, Tagliabue G, Wertelecki W, Zarante I, Bakker MK, Kancherla V, Mastroiacovo P. [A multi-country study of prevalence and early childhood mortality among children with omphalocele](#). Birth Defects Res. 2020 Oct 17. doi: 10.1002/bdr2.1822. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 33067932.

Online Self-Paced Course on Birth Defect Surveillance and Prevention

The online course remains available for interested professionals. The course has been developed by the International Centre on Birth Defects (ICBD Centre) and supported, in part, by funding from the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, through Agreement 2016-2017 with the Task Force for Global Health. The course is designed for clinicians, epidemiologists, public health professionals, and anyone interested in understanding birth defects and improving their prevention and care. The course includes videos, quizzes, a discussion forum, and publications/resources. It is available in English and Spanish. To date, **335 trainees** from **57 countries** have joined the online course. Additional information is available at <http://www.icbdsr.org/online-self-paced-course-on-birth-defect-surveillance-and-prevention/>.

The registration form is available at www.icbdsr.org/course-registration. Once registered, you will receive an email with guidance on how to register in the course platform www.icbdsrtraining.org and how to self-enroll in the self-paced course in either English or Spanish.

Meetings and Conferences

8th International Congress of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (ICGO-2020), November 11-13, 2020, Dubai, UAE <https://www.bitcongress.com/icgo2020/>

16th World Congress on Public Health. 12-16 October 2020. Virtual Edition, <https://wcp2020.com/>

World Congress of Epidemiology WCE 2020 on “Methodological Innovations in Epidemiology”, has been postponed to September 3-6, 2021, Melbourne, Australia <https://wce2020.org/>

EUROCAT Registry Leader Meeting and 15th European Symposium on Congenital Anomalies has been postponed. For questions, please contact: JRC-EUROCAT@ec.europa.eu