



Rheumatic heart disease in pregnancy

It matters because...

- ♥ Rheumatic heart disease (RHD) is up to twice as common in women.
- ♥ During pregnancy the heart has to work harder – up to 30-50% – putting added stress on the heart.
- ♥ Undiagnosed RHD can become symptomatic in pregnancy. If it's not picked up, this can lead to serious complications around the time of childbirth.
- ♥ Babies of mums with RHD are at greater risk of stillbirth, prematurity & complications.
- ♥ Women who need to take blood-thinning medications have an increased risk of complications.
- ♥ Pregnancy and childbirth should be a joyous time – but the burden of RHD can make it feel dangerous and threatening.
- ♥ Pregnancy provides an ideal point of care for diagnosis and monitoring.
- ♥ RHD in pregnancy affects everyone – women, kids, family and community.
- ♥ In Australia and New Zealand, high risk populations include Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander women and Maori and Pacifica women, refugees and women from resource poor countries.
- ♥ *And ...* RHD is preventable. It is a disease of overcrowding and inequity.

Artwork by Rhiana Honeysett of the
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Take home messages

- ♥ Pregnancy provides an ideal point of care for diagnosis and monitoring of RHD.
 - ♥ Don't miss diagnosis! During the antenatal booking visit, check history:
 - ♥ Has the woman (or her family) had rheumatic fever (RF) as a child?
 - ♥ Has she had regular antibiotic injections over a period of time for her heart?
 - ♥ Has she ever had a scan/ultrasound (echocardiogram) or heart surgery?
 - ♥ An echocardiogram and cardiac review is usually required – as early as possible.
 - ♥ Secondary prophylaxis to prevent worsening of RHD (usually 3-4 weekly Bicillin injections) is safe and should continue during pregnancy where prescribed.
 - ♥ Is dental care up to date?
 - ♥ Women requiring anticoagulation during pregnancy need specialist care.
 - ♥ Is the woman registered with an RHDControl Register (where available)?
 - ♥ Early diagnosis and multidisciplinary care are vital to optimise good outcomes for mum and baby.
 - ♥ Have conception counselling and inter-pregnancy planning been discussed?

This postcard is produced by the RHD in pregnancy project – a study of the Australasian Maternity Outcomes Surveillance System (AMOSS)

- Surveillance and research on the burden of serious and uncommon conditions in pregnancy
- Better information on risk factors, diagnosis, management, outcomes
- Supports translation of research findings into policy, clinical guidelines and education resources
- 285 participating maternity sites across ANZ
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More info: www.amos.com.au/rhdinpregnancy

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Also see: www.rhdaustralia.org.au/arf-rhd-guideline