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Important to ensure 100 million children are born to healthy non-diabetic mothers

“Prevention and wellness are key to tackle diabetes in the long-term. It is important to ensure that the 100 million children that will be born during the next decade in India are born to healthy non-diabetic mothers,” said Hema Divakar, Co-chair of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics Committee on Pregnancy and NCDs.

Speaking at a round table discussion Hema, who is also the spokesperson for the International Diabetes Federation in South-East Asia, said most of the clinicians seem to think gestational diabetes is a non-issue post pregnancy, when the sugars revert to normal levels. The long-term longitudinal tracking doesn't happen - it's out of sight and out of mind. The paediatricians are also not alerted that the child is born to a mother with hyperglycaemia. If proactive and responsible tracking is carried out, obesity and resultant diabetes can be prevented.”

With about 4-5 million pregnant women getting affected every year, there are 2 million converting into type 2 diabetes and an alarming proportion of children born to these mothers are succumbing to childhood obesity and early onset adult diabetes, she pointed out.

There are currently over 204 million women living with diabetes and this is projected to increase to 308 million by 2045. Of the women living with diabetes, one-in-three are of reproductive age, making the population-level risk of diabetes during pregnancy high. “Women with previously unknown pre-diabetes — a substantial portion of whom are of reproductive age—are also at high risk of gestational hyperglycaemia,” Hema explained.

Of the 135 million pregnancies leading to live births globally every year, an estimated 21 million are impacted by hyperglycaemia, about 7-8 million by hypertension, about 42 million by maternal overweight and obesity, 26 million by maternal under-nutrition and 56 million by maternal anaemia. “Not only do these conditions increase the risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes and increase perinatal morbidity and mortality but they also identify both the mother and the offspring at being at very high risk of future for diabetes, obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and strokes,” Hema noted.

Harshad Sanghvi, Chief Medical Officer of Jhpiego (an affiliate of The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, US) and Mark Hanson, Director of the Institute of Developmental Science and British Heart Foundation Professor of Cardiovascular Science at the University of Southampton, UK, said “Innovations and inventions via point-of-care devices that reach every woman in low- and middle-income countries, is the need of the hour.”

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