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## Inhaled Corticosteroids (ICSs) and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to inhaled corticosteroids can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

### *What are inhaled corticosteroids?*

Inhaled corticosteroids (ICSs) are medicines used daily to prevent and control the symptoms of asthma. ICSs are taken using an inhaler (or pump) and have fewer side effects than corticosteroids taken in a pill form since most of the inhaled medicine goes directly to the lungs instead of traveling throughout the body. This fact sheet will focus only on corticosteroids that are inhaled, and not corticosteroids taken in other ways. However, information on this fact sheet should also be relevant for corticosteroids sprayed in the nose (intranasal). For more information about corticosteroids taken in a pill form, see the OTIS fact sheet [Prednisone/Prednisolone and Pregnancy](#).

ICSs help control the swelling of the airways in the lungs and reduce mucus production so that asthma attacks are less likely. ICSs are not effective in stopping immediate symptoms when you are having an asthma attack. Examples of ICSs include beclomethasone dipropionate (Qvar<sup>®</sup>), budesonide (Pulmicort<sup>®</sup>), fluticasone propionate (Flovent<sup>®</sup>), mometasone furoate (Asmanex<sup>®</sup>), and triamcinolone acetonide (Azmacort<sup>®</sup>).

### *I just found out I am pregnant, should I stop taking my ICS?*

No. You should always talk to your doctor before making any changes in your medication. Untreated asthma may pose an

increased risk to pregnancy (see the OTIS fact sheet [Asthma and Pregnancy](#)). ICSs are considered preferred asthma treatments during pregnancy because they typically control asthma well. In addition, they are absorbed into the body in lower amounts compared to pill medicines, so that only very small amounts are likely to reach the developing baby.

Budesonide is the best studied inhaled corticosteroid during pregnancy. However, none of the other ICSs have known pregnancy risks. If you are taking an ICS that is working for you, it is not recommended that you switch medications during pregnancy. It is important to control your asthma symptoms with a medicine proven to work for you.

### *Can taking ICSs during my pregnancy cause a birth defect?*

ICSs are unlikely to cause a birth defect. When corticosteroid pills are taken during the first trimester of pregnancy, some studies suggest a small chance (less than 1%) for cleft lip with or without cleft palate (split in the lip or roof of the mouth). However, studies on ICSs have found no overall increased risk for birth defects. For example, one study on 2014 pregnancies with first trimester exposure to inhaled budesonide found no increased risk of birth defects, and another study on 722 pregnancies with exposures to ICSs anytime during pregnancy found no increased risk of birth defects. High doses of ICSs (doses that could be closer to the doses found in

corticosteroid pills) have not been well studied during pregnancy.

***Can taking ICSs during pregnancy cause other pregnancy complications?***

Although corticosteroid pills have been associated with lower birth weight, this risk has not been seen with ICSs. Untreated asthma may also be associated with low birth weight and other pregnancy complications (see the fact sheet on [Asthma and Pregnancy](#)).

***Can I take ICSs while breastfeeding?***

Yes. Although most ICSs have not been studied during breastfeeding, the amount of medicine that would be in the breast milk following inhalation is too small to cause problems for a breastfeeding infant.

***What if the father of the baby takes an ICS? Is there a risk?***

No. There is no evidence that ICSs taken by men would affect their sperm. ICSs taken by men do not reach the developing baby. For general information about a father's exposures, see the OTIS fact sheet [Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy](#).

***OTIS is currently conducting a study looking at asthma and the medications used to treat asthma in pregnancy. If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call 1-877-311-8972.***

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*If you have questions about the information on this fact sheet or other exposures during pregnancy, call **OTIS** at 1-866-626-6847.*