



# Pregnant and Breastfeeding Mums to Benefit from Better Labeling



The average pregnant American mum will take anywhere from three to five prescription medications throughout her pregnancy, which has caused a massive increase in demand for better labeling. While there is currently an alphabetic “risk” system in place, labeling medications for use through pregnancy and breastfeeding as “A, B, C, D, and X” to classify a drug’s level of risk, it is over simplified and often misinterpreted.

The United States isn’t the only nation clamoring for more thorough labeling. Doctors and breast feeding professionals in Australia have been asking for improved labeling for the past several years. Meredith Laverty, a spokeswoman for the Australian Breastfeeding Association, has said



that the organisation often receives calls from concerned breastfeeding mums who want to know if the medications they have been prescribed could harm their babies.

## More Comprehensive Labeling

The new labeling system will help mums not only weigh in the pros and cons for their own health, but fully understand the impact that the medication can have on her fetus or breastfeeding baby. Starting in June 2015, the antiquated lettered system will be replaced by three more detailed subsections:

- **Pregnancy:** This subsection will advise mums on how the medication can affect the fetus.
- **Lactation:** This subsection will outline whether or not a medication can enter into a woman's breast milk and whether it can or cannot affect her breastfeeding infant
- **Females and Males of Reproductive Potential:** This subsection will offer additional information about how the medicine can affect the fertility of both men and women, as well as additional information about birth control and pregnancy testing.

## Dispelling the “No Medication Myth”

The misunderstanding of labels on certain medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding has resulted in many mums believing that all over the counter drugs are completely off-limits.

This is particularly problematic for mums who may need medication to treat chronic illnesses such as asthma and arthritis, as well as mums who may develop health problems as a result of the pregnancy, such as diabetes or hypertension.

By outlining which medications are safe and which pose more of a risk and at what stages of a baby's development, mums can make more educated decisions about whether or not she should take the medication.

## A Long Term Project



While this new grading system may be going into effect as of June of next year, the FDA has stated that it could take several years for the labeling of all medications to be re-written to match the new labeling guidelines.

Whether Australia will adopt such a system has yet to be seen, but all mums who are concerned about her medications and their effects on her fetus or breast milk can obtain the best guidance from her doctor or through Mothersafe, a free counselling service that is run by the Royal Women's Hospital.

## Further Reading:

- <http://news.health.com/2014/12/05/fda-issues-new-drug-label-rules-to-better-inform-pregnant-women/>
- <http://www.motherisk.org/women/drugs.jsp>
- <http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/parenting/mums-may-be-able-to-take-more-medicines-while-breastfeeding/story-fnet085v-1226706966140>