

THE TERATOLOGY SOCIETY

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Pregnancy Infection Concern Rises with Resurgence of Syphilis, Emergence of Zika

Medical Community Should Also Prepare for Intentional Infectious Agents, according to Teratology Society Journal

RESTON, VIRGINIA—The recent Zika virus epidemic coupled with the resurgences of established infections, like syphilis, emphasize a need for better preparation in mitigating the potential effects on pregnant women and their infants, according to co-editors of the latest issue of [Birth Defects Research: Infections During Pregnancy- Established and Emerging](#).

The scientific journal released today (see the [Overview](#), doi: 10.1002/bdr2.1018) includes studies on several high profile infectious outbreaks in recent years, including [syphilis in 2013-2014](#). “Here’s an infection that was rapidly on the decline with the widespread use of penicillin, but as the authors point out, an increased number of cases re-emerged among young women in the U.S. across all races and ethnicities, including pregnant women,” explained Sonja Rasmussen, MD, MS, the Teratology Society President and one of the journal’s co-editors. “The resurgence illustrates just how important it is to remain vigilant in ensuring pregnant women are appropriately diagnosed and treated,” she added.

Furthermore, little is known about the effects of most biological threat agents on the pregnant woman or her fetus. [One article in the special issue \(Watson et al.\)](#) outlines prophylaxis and treatment recommendations for seven infectious agents that could be used during a biological attack. “Our nation continues to refine and enhance existing plans to respond to the threat of an intentional release of biological threat agents; however, specific guidance is needed for the prophylaxis and treatment of pregnant woman,” explains Dana Meaney-Delman, MD, MPH, senior author of the paper, co-editor of the special issue, and co-Lead of the Pregnancy and Birth Defects Task Force for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Zika Virus Response.

In [a separate article](#) included in the issue, Dr. Rasmussen, who is also director of the Division of Public Health Dissemination for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and lead author of the breakthrough [2016 review](#) that established prenatal Zika virus exposure as a cause of severe birth defects, questions how strategies to study the effects of emerging infections on the developing baby could be improved. She uses Zika and West Nile viruses as examples.

“This paper addresses the challenging topic of how to safely and ethically investigate countermeasures in pregnant women to both present and emerging infectious diseases,” adds Richard H. Beigi, MD, MSc, co-author of [another included article](#) describing the importance of studying antimicrobial medications and novel therapeutics for infectious diseases in pregnancy. Dr. Beigi is a board certified obstetrician

and gynecologist with Magee Women's Hospital who has published extensively in the area of infectious diseases in pregnancy. He noted why the special journal issue is particularly groundbreaking in content. "The contents of this combined work lay a solid foundation for understanding the importance and sometimes devastating impact of infectious diseases in pregnancy."

About the Teratology Society

[The Teratology Society](#), an international professional group of scientists hailed as the premier source for cutting-edge research and authoritative information related to birth defects and developmentally mediated disorders, publishes *Birth Defects Research* with John Wiley & Sons. Groundbreaking updates on topics, such as Zika virus, will be presented at the 2017 Annual Meeting June 24 – 28 in Denver, CO. For more information or to attend, please visit www.teratology.org/meetings/2017.

The Teratology Society is made up of more than 700 members worldwide specializing in a variety of disciplines related to birth defects research, including developmental biology and toxicology, reproduction and endocrinology, epidemiology, cell and molecular biology, nutritional biochemistry, and genetics as well as the clinical disciplines of prenatal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics, neonatology, medical genetics, and teratogen risk counseling. Scientists interested in membership in the Teratology Society are encouraged to visit www.teratology.org.

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