

# Half of pregnant women at risk due to weight

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More than half of all expectant mothers in Scotland are overweight or obese at the start of their pregnancy.

The problem is more acute among older mothers, with almost 60 per cent in the at-risk category.

They and their unborn children face a greater chance of complications, according to a report by the Scottish NHS.

The proportion of mothers in Scotland with a body mass index (BMI) likely to cause concern has climbed from 41 per cent to almost 51 per cent in six years. In Europe about 30 to 37 per cent of women were overweight or obese.

The report, released yesterday by the Information Services Division of NHS Scotland, said that there had been "a consistent creeping increase" in the proportion of mothers overweight or obese in all age groups.

Linda Bauld, Cancer Research UK's prevention champion, said: "It's deeply concerning. Tackling obesity is complex but there are steps that the Scottish government can take to help everyone, including mums-to-be, keep a healthy weight."

Pregnant women who are obese are more likely to have a miscarriage or stillbirth. They have a higher chance of developing high blood pressure and diabetes and their babies are more likely to spend time in a neonatal unit.

Rising rates of caesarean sections have also been linked to the increase in overweight women. The percentage of "normal" deliveries in Scotland has fallen from 76 per cent in 1975-76 to 56 per cent in 2016-17. In Edinburgh, Tommy's

Metabolic Antenatal Clinic has been set up with the support of NHS Lothian specifically to help severely obese women deliver healthy babies. Fiona Denison, who sees patients at the clinic and researches the issue at Edinburgh University's MRC Centre for Reproductive Health, said that the figures in the report mirrored her experience.

She attributed the increases to unhealthy food and sedentary lifestyles. "Women generally do not want to be overweight," she said. "It is difficult. We all know that we would prefer to eat more healthily and exercise more, but actually life is busy. It is very difficult to incorporate changes in your lifestyle."

Society needed to change to prevent women and men from becoming too heavy. "Often the first time women are confronted with their weight being a potential problem is when they are pregnant because they are not otherwise unwell," she said.

When women first saw the NHS about their pregnancy in the year to March, 27.4 per cent were overweight and 23.2 per cent were obese—a total of 50.6 per cent. This compares with 23.5 per cent who were overweight and 17.6 per cent who were obese in 2010-11.

Aileen Campbell, public health minister for Scotland, said: "We are consulting on our new diet and obesity strategy which sets out proposals to create a culture where children develop good food habits throughout life, which we believe can start before birth."

"Our maternal and infant nutrition framework helps NHS boards, local authorities and others to improve the nutrition of pregnant women, babies and children."