

Mom's Job May Increase Risk of Birth Defects

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The offspring of custodians and chemists may be at greater risk for some birth defects than children of parents with other occupations, researchers say.

In a survey of mothers of children with birth defects, those who were janitors or scientists were more likely to have children with certain conditions, Michele Herdt-Losavio, PhD, of the New York State Department of Health, and colleagues reported online in *Occupational & Environmental Medicine*.

Herdt-Losavio said her team didn't assess what factors may account for this association, but offered a possible explanation.

"What we can guess by looking at these job titles is that . . . it's possible that they work with chemicals," she said. "It's not possible to say what those chemicals might be, or how much they might work with. But what we can do is point other [researchers] in the direction and give them some idea of where they might want to dig further and collect more data."

Action Points

- Explain that a survey of mothers of children with birth defects found that women who were janitors or scientists were more likely to have children with certain defects.



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Interview with: Michele Herdt-Losavio, PhD, N.Y. State Dept. of Health, Albany, N.Y.

Herdt-Losavio said she and her colleagues are currently looking further into the "scientist" category -- which encompassed biological scientists, chemists, pharmacists, engineers, and geologists -- to determine which fields may be most at risk.

The team conducted the study because several previous efforts had found an association between a mother's occupation and a child's birth defects. Most, however, have grouped birth defects together, without assessing individual problems.

So they looked at 45 specific birth defects among 24 different maternal occupations. They analyzed 8,977 cases of birth defects and 3,833 healthy controls from the National Birth