



**We support
twins, triplets
and more...**

News release

Thursday January 14

Twin baby deaths may have been prevented with better care, report shows

A report published today (Thursday), shows babies from twin pregnancies are dying at an alarming rate with many deaths avoidable if better care had been given.

The **MBRRACE Perinatal Confidential Enquiry** into stillbirths and neonatal baby deaths in twin pregnancies shows twins are twice as likely to be stillborn, and are 3.5 times more likely to die as newborns compared with babies in pregnancies with one baby.

Clinical experts in multiple pregnancy looked at a random sample of UK-wide twin pregnancies which sadly involved at least one fetal loss, stillbirth or neonatal death. Fifty twin pregnancies and 80 baby deaths were reviewed from 2017.

They found most deaths may have been preventable with better care.

For around three in five mothers, care after their baby/babies died was poor. If it had been better, it may have meant bereaved mothers were likely to have been better supported in their physical and emotional health.

Keith Reed, CEO of Twins Trust, said: "What's shocking and saddening about this report is that many of these baby deaths were preventable.

"High quality care was only found in a minority of deaths - less than 1 in 5 - where it was unlikely that anything else could have been done to save the baby.

"It is critical that maternity units adhere to NICE multiple birth guidance and our [T-MEP quality improvement project](#) can help them do this - and save lives. Urgent change needs to happen now and more Twin Clinics need to be established. We know that maternity units with these clinics deliver better care, but less than half of all maternity units in the UK have them.

"Forty per cent of the women were not looked after by a multidisciplinary team of doctors, midwives and sonographers who were experts in twin pregnancies. Sadly, only half of the women had a discussion with health professionals about the individual risks in their twin pregnancy."

Twin pregnancies have higher risks because women are more likely to have complications such as high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia, preterm labour and bleeding before or during childbirth.

“But whilst they are potentially more complicated, we know that much more could be done to reduce the risks for women and their babies and we are going to hold NHS Trusts to account. Government and health professionals must take action now to avoid further unnecessary deaths,” said Keith.

“We are eager to roll out our project nationwide. From the first phase of the project where we worked with 30 maternity units in England, there has been a 7% reduction in stillbirths and an 18% reduction in neonatal deaths. Funding would enable us to roll this programme out nationwide and to save the lives of future multiple birth babies.

“National policies promoting good care are not clear enough. NICE multiple birth guidance, which was published ten years ago, is not being followed by enough Trusts.

“We don’t want to see further failings in care for the multiple birth community because the trajectory is showing that, after brilliant results between 2014 and 2016 where twin stillbirths were cut by 50%, standards have been falling.”

As part of the enquiry, clinical experts looked at whether the care women and babies received may have contributed to the babies’ death. Most deaths may have been prevented with better care.

For around three in five mothers, care after their babies died was poor. Communication between obstetricians, midwives and neonatal teams was not joined up, which contributed to poor postnatal and bereavement care.

If a single placenta was diagnosed, meaning it was a monochorionic (identical) twin pregnancy, most women did not then have the recommended two weekly scans from 16 weeks. Regular scans surveillance could detect Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome (TTTS) – which is a devastating condition, and could result in the death of one, or both babies. If picked up early, laser ablation can take place in the womb which could save babies’ lives.

Dr Surabhi Nanda, Consultant in Maternal Fetal Medicine, who was on the panel and the topic expert group, said: “In nearly all cases, the follow-up care of the woman and baby/babies in the hospital and the community, left a lot to be desired.

“This meant parents did not receive adequate answers about why their baby or babies died, and the inadequate local reviews meant that the sharing learned and chance for units to make changes to prevent future deaths was missed.

“This is a huge wake-up call for healthcare professionals who look after multiple birth pregnancies.

“I urge them to read the full report, implement its recommendations and follow NICE multiple birth guidance. If this were done, it is clear that future babies’ lives could be saved. Extra help is available to units, via Twins Trust, and urgent action must be taken.”

Healthcare professionals have access to CPD, webinars and courses thanks to experts at the [Twins Trust Centre for Research and Clinical Excellence](#) at St George's Hospital in London headed by Professor Asma Khalil. Since its launch in July 2020, Professor Khalil has hosted webinars which have reached more than 1,000 healthcare professionals.

For anyone expecting twins, triplets or more, Twins Trust has an [antenatal care checklist](#) which details everything you should expect throughout your pregnancy. One important question to ask is if your local hospital has a Twins Clinic.

Notes to Editors:

View the full report here. <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/mbrance-uk/reports>

The [MBRRACE-UK Perinatal Mortality Surveillance Report](#) for births in 2018 (published December 2020) shows that neonatal deaths for twins has increased from 5.45 (per 1,000 births) in 2017 to 6.38 in 2018.

The gap has widened between singletons and multiples with twins now 1.7 times more likely to result in stillbirth (up from 1.5) and 4.3 times more likely to result in neonatal death (up from 3 times).

The MBRRACE findings mirror the latest [ONS figures](#) (for England and Wales) released in November 2020.

- The number of multiple births in 2019 dropped to the lowest since 2005 to 9,656 maternities (10,005 in 2018).
- However, the stillbirth number has increased from 131 stillbirths in 2018 to 150 in 2019

Keith Reed is available for interviews.

Liz Draper from MBRRACE is also available for interviews.

To arrange these or for further information please contact Alyson Chorley alysonchorley@twinstrust.org or pressoffice@twinstrust.org call 01252 332344 / 07791 383494.

Twins Trust is the only UK-wide charity dedicated to improving the lives and wellbeing of families with twins, triplets or more. Representing 20,000 members and 100 local clubs in the UK, Twins Trust provides help and support to both parents and professionals to meet the unique challenges faced by multiple birth families. We invest in research to save lives, change lives and create better futures for multiple birth families. We also run a unique quality improvement project at Maternity Units to encourage and help with adherence to NICE QS46.

For further information, please visit www.twinstrust.org

1. Follow us on: Twitter/Facebook/Insta @twinstrust
2. For confidential and emotional support for families with multiples, please call Twinline which is staffed by trained volunteers that are parents of multiples and can offer support on sleeping, feeding, crying, behaviour, discipline, school issues or special needs. It is free to call on 0800 138 0509 and is open Monday to Friday from 10am–1pm and from 7pm–10pm.

MBRRACE Mothers and Babies: reducing risk through audits and confidential enquiries throughout the UK.