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Opioid addiction skyrockets in pregnant women, CDC says

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By Ed Payne CONNECT

KNOXVILLE, TN (CNN/RNN) – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says more than 72,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year. That's a seven percent jump from the year before. Most of those deaths were opioid-related.

Hidden in those numbers is another growing crisis – opioid addiction in pregnant women.

"I had been addicted to opioids since I was 17," Rachel Solomon said. "My grandmother gave me my first Percocet. I had a headache and she told me that would help."

If there was a last refuge of people insulated from the opioid epidemic, it was pregnant women, but that's not the case anymore.

Opioid addiction for them has quadrupled over the last 15 years.

Solomon grew up in eastern Tennessee, a part of the country hard hit by the opioid epidemic.

Two years ago, she had a miscarriage. Her doctors said it was due to her opioid addiction.

So, when Solomon found she was pregnant again, she was terrified.

"I was very worried, but I just thought that my body was not going to be able to carry it," she said.

The risks of being pregnant while addicted to opioids are stark – miscarriage and stillbirth.

There's also the possibility of a baby being born into a crisis of withdrawal, known as neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).



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For Dr. Craig Towers at the University of Tennessee Medical Center, that was not acceptable, so he decided to challenge the status quo. Conventional wisdom was not to treat a woman for her addiction until after the baby was delivered. Towers said he has detoxed more than 600 women from opioids while they were pregnant and not a single baby has died. Another plus, those babies also aren't going through withdrawal symptoms after they're born. Solomon has completed the detox program is hoping for the best for her unborn son, who she'll name Brantley. "He asked me just to trust him," Solomon said of Towers, "and nobody's ever done that with me, you know? They've never cared like that." Copyright 2018 CNN and Raycom News Network. All rights reserved.

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