Study flags heat impact on babies

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Antalya (Turkey): Indian clinicians report some of the world's highest levels of heat-related impacts on the health of newborn and pregnant women, a global study launched on the sidelines of COP31 here has shown.

The report commissioned by Wellcome, a trust that runs a dedicated climate and health programme, states that in India "98 per cent (of the sampled clinicians) have cared for a pregnant woman, and 98 per cent for a baby, whose health they believe was affected by extreme heat".

It states that 66 per cent of Indian doctors reported an increase in heat-related cases or complications affecting foetal or newborn health, while 62 per cent reported an increase affecting pregnant women. Moreover, 26 per cent of doctors have seen pregnancy complications requiring additional monitoring or treatment.

In the study, clinicians describe a wide range of impacts, from low birth weight and restricted growth to dehydration and feeding difficulties among newborns due to heat exposure.

The survey was conducted among 1,000 healthcare professionals during September-October 2026 across the UK, Australia, India, Brazil and Zimbabwe, with 200 respondents in each country. All respondents were involved in pregnancy, childbirth, postnatal, newborn or maternal care and included obstetricians, gynaecologists as well as other frontline maternal-health workers.

"Across all five countries, 73 per cent reported an increase in heat-related cases or complications affecting pregnant women over the past five years, and 76 per cent an increase affecting foetal or newborn health," the report states.

"Women exposed to extreme heat during pregnancy have much worse pregnancy outcomes: increased risk of stillbirth, pre-term birth and congenital abnormalities," said Alan Dangour, director of climate and health at Wellcome, at the report's launch at COP31.

"As the climate changes, this is going to become worse and worse. We are at the early stages now and must put in place the procedures, the guidelines and the systems



to respond to this challenge," Dangour added.

Youssef Nassef, director of the adaptation programme at UN Climate Change, observed that heat had a severe impact on maternal health and newborn babies, but unfortunately, "only about 1 per cent of formal climate finance went to health".

Nassef pointed out that health occupied a central position in the UN climate change negotiation process, particularly with regard to adaptation.

"As part of the Global Goal on Adaptation... the idea is that there are three pillars. One is averting all mortality and morbidity due to climate impacts. Two is ensuring that health systems are fully resilient. And three is adapting, making sure that communities are adapted to the adverse effects of climate change on health," he said.

Karthika Kumar, a research fellow at the George Institute who was involved in the study, said heat harmed pregnant women in ways that went far beyond their bodies. "Health, climate, urban planning and community services have to work together," Kumar said.

"I am aware of the study. It is an evolving area of work, but the concern is genuine," said Rajib Dasgupta, a public health expert and professor at the Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health at the JNU, told **The Telegraph** on Saturday.

"The study is a tell-tale proof that we need to put in place heat action plans for states and cities considering key health factors, including the impact of heat on pregnant women and newborns," said a Calcutta-based public health expert who did not wish to be named.