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Obesity increasing C-section deliveries in Windsor area

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Windsor and Essex County's high obesity rate is contributing to the increasing number of babies delivered by a caesarean section, Windsor Regional Hospital officials say.

The hospital's 25.9 per cent C-section rate is driven in part by the rising number of expectant mothers who are obese and require the procedure because of complications during childbirth, said Windsor Regional CEO David Musyj.

"That leads to issues where larger, obese mothers tend to have larger babies, and there are more health risks associated (with childbirth)," he said. "We have definitely seen that here."

Dr. Anthony Pattinson, Windsor Regional's chief of obstetrics and gynecology, said obese mothers also tend to have longer labours and are more likely to have medical conditions that place them at a greater risk, such as high blood pressure and type-2 diabetes.

According to a recently released 2007 Canadian Community Health Survey, 19.8 per cent of Windsor-Essex adults over the age of 18 are considered obese. Across the country, 23 per cent of women of childbearing age are obese.

Of the 4,428 babies born at Windsor Regional in 2007-08, nearly 26 per cent were delivered by C-section, Musyj said. The local C-section rate has been climbing over the last 10 years or so.

That number reflects a national trend that has seen Canada's C-section rate reach a record high.

This week, Canada's pregnancy specialists issued a warning against what they call a worrisome C-section trend. The country's C-section rate was 26.3 per cent in 2005-06, up from 17.6 per cent in 1993, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information. The World Health Organization says any rate higher than 15 per cent is a sign of "inappropriate usage."

With one in four births in Canada now occurring by C-section, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada is urging doctors and women to choose the procedure only when there is a medical reason for it.

It's estimated that only one to two per cent of C-sections in Canada are performed because the mother requested the procedure.

But fear as the pain builds during childbirth, the convenience of a C-section and the growing number of obese expectant mothers are all factors contributing to the increase in surgical births, experts say.

While there are women who elect to have the procedure, Pattinson said C-sections are mostly performed out of necessity at Windsor Regional. He said expectant mothers are educated about the increased risks associated with C-sections, such as bleeding, infections and potential harm to the baby.

For Punita Patel, delivering her first child by C-section was not an option. After 17 hours of labour, the Windsor woman realized her daughter would not arrive into the world naturally. Following a consultation with doctors at Windsor Regional, she underwent a C-section early Wednesday morning.

"I was a little scared but it went OK," Patel said as she and little Shreeya rested in their hospital room Thursday. Patel said she was experiencing post-surgery pain and would prefer to have a natural birth if she has another child.

Pattinson said a number of women who deliver their first child by C-section tend to repeat the procedure when they have their second or third child. Musyj said there were 462 "repeat" C-sections at Windsor Regional last year and 686 women had the procedure for the first time.

Musyj said the average age of women who have C-sections at Windsor Regional is 30.1 years and 28.7 for those who deliver their babies vaginally.

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