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### Maternal health and health-related behaviours and their associations with child health: evidence from an Australian birth cohort

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**Objective:** This study investigates the associations between maternal health and health-related behaviours (nutrition, physical activity, alcohol consumption and smoking) both during pregnancy and up to 15 months from childbirth and children's health outcomes during infancy and adolescence (general health, presence of a chronic illness, and physical health outcome index).

**Methods:** This study used Wave 1 (2004) and Wave 7 (2016) data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children (LSAC). We measured mothers' general health, presence of a medical condition during pregnancy and mental health during pregnancy or in the year after childbirth. We subsequently measured the children's general health, presence of a medical condition, and physical health outcome index at ages 0–1 (infancy) and 12–13 (adolescence). Binary logistic and linear regression analyses were performed to examine the association between the mothers' health-related variables and their children's health.

**Results:** Our results showed that poor general health of the mother in the year after childbirth was associated with higher odds of poor health in infants and adolescents in all three dimensions: poor general health (OR: 3.13, 95%

CI: 2.16–4.52 for infants; OR: 1.39, 95% CI: 0.95–2.04 for adolescents), presence of a chronic condition (OR: 1.47, 95% CI: 1.19–1.81 for adolescents) and lower physical health score ( $b = -0.94$ ,  $p$ -value  $<0.05$  for adolescents). Our study also revealed that the presence of a chronic condition in mothers during pregnancy significantly increased the likelihood of the presence of a chronic condition in their offspring during infancy (OR: 1.31, 95% CI: 1.12–1.54) and during adolescence (OR: 1.45, 95% CI: 1.20–1.75). The study found that stressful life events faced by mothers increase the odds of poor general health or any chronic illness during adolescence, while stress, anxiety or depression during pregnancy and psychological distress in the year after childbirth increase the odds of any chronic illness during infancy.

**Conclusions:** The present study found evidence that poor maternal physical and mental health during pregnancy or up to 15 months from childbirth has adverse health consequences for their offspring as measured by general health, presence of chronic health conditions, and physical health index scores. This suggests that initiatives to improve maternal physical and mental health would not only improve child health but would also reduce the national health burden.