

As health care reform moves forward one of the issues that will be looked at closely is expensive procedures that are unnecessary or where alternatives exist that are less costly. Cesarean child delivery may be one of those procedures that will be considered.

Today approximately 1/3 of all births are through cesarean. This is much higher than it was in the past and research doesn't support the necessity of performing cesarean at this high a rate. While c-sections are sometimes necessary, it is estimated that they are necessary only 5 to 10% of the time. The World Health Organization has adopted a policy that cesarean birth rates higher than 15% do more harm than good. The U.S. performs more than twice this percentage.

C-sections can result in injury to the baby. For the mother it can cause excessive bleeding, infections and negative events from anesthesia.

There are a number of factors that have been identified as leading to this increase in cesarean births. Many are due to unsubstantiated beliefs that would preclude a vaginal delivery such as a large baby and previous cesarean births. Previous birth by cesarean is an especially large factor. Many hospitals require that once a cesarean birth has been performed on a woman, she must always have a cesarean birth. They require this both for legal reasons and because they believe it is necessary even though research hasn't supported this need.

There is also motivation for c-section because it can be more convenient than a normal birth. Delivery can be scheduled rather than waiting for the baby to determine when it is ready to come into the world. That is also the downside of scheduling a birth (which also includes induced labor). Recent research has shown that we don't know as well as we had thought when a baby is ready to be born. Forcing a birth before that time may lead to health problems for the baby.

Unfortunately c-section is sometimes recommended because it is financially more lucrative for the doctor and the hospital than vaginal delivery. In a recent conference about this issue it was suggested by one speaker that doctors should be reimbursed higher rates for vaginal delivery than for surgical delivery in order to reduce the frequency of cesarean delivery.

If you are pregnant and considering c-section I would recommend that you discuss these points with your doctor. You may also want to search for the most current information on c-section on the internet so that you can make an informed decision with your doctor.