

Rare pregnancy problems on rise with caesareans

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AUSTRALIA'S rising caesarean rate is being blamed for an increase in a rare condition that can kill mother and child within minutes.

Caesarean scar pregnancies, in which an embryo embeds into scar tissue left by former caesarean sections, can cause the uterus to rupture and haemorrhage, with little warning or pain, leading to certain death unless the woman is treated immediately.

It is still very rare, but the incidence has been increasing worldwide, in line with the caesarean rate, which now stands at 31 per cent in Australia.

A study in the *International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* last year found that most caesarean scar pregnancies were terminated in the first trimester because the growing

embryo can rupture the uterus, or the placenta can grow through the lining of the uterus and adhere to the bladder.

In October last year King Edward Memorial hospital in Perth reported that it had handled nine cases in five years, with five women having to undergo chemotherapy and one having an emergency hysterectomy.

The president of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Christine Tippett, said better ultrasound techniques had allowed earlier diagnoses, but the incidence of caesarean scar pregnancies had been rising in line with the caesarean rate.

"Caesarean section scar pregnancies, which can only be detected through transvaginal ultrasounds, have very significant implications for women and can lead to serious bleeding



Debilitating ... Sharon Evans, with her family, suffered from two painful and invasive caesarean scar pregnancies. Photo: Peter Morris

and surgery, and in some rare cases, hysterectomy. The problem is that they are not associated with the same pain you get in a tubal ectopic pregnancy so often a woman doesn't know about it until it ruptures."

A fitness instructor and former television panellist, Sharon Evans, 39, had her world turned

upside down last year when she had two caesarean scar pregnancies within 10 months, resulting in seven weeks of chemotherapy and four bouts of surgery. "I can't believe some women would opt for a caesarean if they don't need it," Ms Evans said yesterday. "I had to have one when my second

daughter was a breech baby, but I had no idea it would lead to this. I've been through hell in the past year, and I believe my strength of mind and my high fitness levels helped me through it, but I tell anyone not to have a caesarean unless it is a medical requirement."

Ms Evans, of North Balgowlah, needed chemotherapy three times a week with the first caesarean scar pregnancy, but the treatment failed, forcing her to have surgery at 13 weeks. "The second time I got pregnant I was just gobsmacked. It had happened again, and this time it was twins."

She has now decided not to have any more children. "Why would anyone have a caesarean if you can have it naturally? I just want people to stop and think about it. It is not minor surgery. It is very, very painful and very invasive - and horrific complications can come from it."