New weight gain guidelines established for pregnant women

New guidelines for how much weight a woman should gain during pregnancy have been established by a national team of physicians and health care professionals, including Anna Maria Siega-Riz, PhD, UNC epidemiology and nutrition professor and associate chair of the Department of Epidemiology. Siega-Riz was one of four team members who presented the new guidelines at a news conference May 28, 2009, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

“This work has important implications for the lives of women, given that in any one year, approximately four million women give birth,” Siega-Riz says.

The team, established by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, updated recommendations the Institute of Medicine made in 1990. The new guidelines reflect changing U.S. demographics, particularly the surge in the number of Americans who are overweight or obese. Healthy American women at a normal weight for their height should gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy, the guidelines state. Underweight women should gain more, 28 to 40 pounds, and overweight women should gain less, 15 to 25 pounds. These ranges match the 1990 guidelines, but the report also specifies a new range for obese women (BMI greater than 30) which limits the recommended gain between 11 and 20 pounds.

Preparedness is a critical area of our School’s interdisciplinary expertise. The global public health crisis sparked by the H1N1 flu pandemic tested the depth and breadth of the School’s many programs and its training and response capabilities.

“The results of our response have confirmed for us the durability and effectiveness of our planning,” says Bill Gentry, director of the School’s Community Preparedness and Disaster Management program and health policy and management lecturer.

“We were able to put more than three years of planning into practice,” adds Pia MacDonald, PhD, director of the North Carolina Center for Public Health Preparedness (NCCPHP) and research assistant professor of epidemiology.

Our School worked closely with the UNC School of Medicine, UNC Hospitals, local health departments and, especially, the N.C. Division of Health and Human Services to ensure that health care providers, public officials and the general public were aware of H1N1 symptoms, how to avoid spreading the virus, how to contain and treat suspected or confirmed cases and how to plan for treatment in case of exposure. Our experts were quoted in print, broadcast and Web news stories across the state and nation.

For more information, see www.sph.unc.edu.