

BIPOLAR DISORDERS Factsheet

October 2021

How are infectious agents related to risk for bipolar disorder?

Exposure to infection is often cited as a risk factor for schizophrenia, and has recently been investigated in bipolar disorder. This topic summarises the available evidence for the risk of developing bipolar disorder following exposure to influenza and other infectious agents, both before and after birth. The physiological mechanisms of any association of these infectious agents with bipolar disorder are largely unclear. Please also see the topic in Physical Features on markers for infectious agents in adults with bipolar disorder.

What is the evidence for infectious agents as risk factors for bipolar disorder?

Moderate to low quality evidence suggests a large effect of increased risk of bipolar disorder with exposure to meningitis or tuberculosis in childhood, and a medium-sized effect of lower risk of bipolar disorder with exposure to chicken pox in childhood.

There was a medium to large effect of increased risk of bipolar disorder with exposure to maternal influenza during pregnancy, although when trimesters were analysed separately, the effect remained significant only in the third trimester, and only in one study. There were no associations between risk of bipolar disorder and exposure to maternal urinary tract infections or herpes simplex virus 2.

For more information see the technical table



NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about bipolar disorder or its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

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