

HEALTH

# Toronto's Miles Nadal Heart Centre tackling heart disease in pregnancy



By **Jamie Mauracher** • Global News

Posted December 30, 2019 6:20 pm



Toronto hospital tackles heart disease in pregnancy



WATCH ABOVE: A specialized Toronto-based hospital program is giving Canadian women with congenital heart defects a chance at successful, full-term pregnancies. Jamie Mauracher reports. – Dec 30, 2019



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For Jennifer Oliveira, who was born with a congenital **heart defect**, the fact that her daughter, Mila, is about to ring in another new year and turn two is nothing short of a miracle.

“We wouldn’t let ourselves get excited about her until your safe period for survival being about 25 (or) 26 weeks,” the Oshawa resident told Global News while her toddler played under the Christmas tree.

Born with tricuspid atresia, Oliveira has only one heart valve instead of two.

“It is hard on my body, especially when (I am) pregnant, and there is about 50 per cent more blood. My heart can’t keep up,” the 36-year-old explained about her condition.

As a result, she suffered five miscarriages while trying to conceive and was in the process of adopting when she fell pregnant again.

“I was terrified... there are a lot of (people) that have my same condition or condition similar and a lot of doctor say they can’t have babies and a lot of doctors even tell them to abort if they fall pregnant,” she explained.

And while only 50 per cent of women with her condition carry a pregnancy to term, unlike others, Oliveira had access to a special type of care: under the eye of cardiologist Dr. Candice Silversides and the team Mount Sinai Hospital’s Miles Nadal Heart Centre in the heart of downtown Toronto.

“It’s a high-risk obstetrics centre but in combination it’s also a cardiac centre ... and the largest program of it’s kind in Canada,” Silversides told Global News.

Silversides, who is also head of the program, said the centre treats approximately 300 pregnant patients a year, compared to most Canadian hospitals which see only two or three of these types of cases.

Nationally, there are an estimated 257,000 people living with a congenital heart disease.

At while at least half will face the prospect of health complications, multiple surgeries or even sudden death, those risks become even greater for women who fall pregnant.

Two out of 10 women with a congenital heart disease will run into some sort of complication during pregnancy. It's a statistic Silversides said the centre's unique tag-team approach, coupled with research over the last decade, has drastically improved.

"What is really important is to talk to women early, prior to getting pregnant, so they can hear about the risks specific to their cardiac condition ... (so they can) make an informed decision on whether or not they want to go forward with the pregnancy," said Dr. Silvesides,

For Oliveira, she said the dream of having a child of her own, far outweighed any risk.

"To have her... it's amazing," she said, having just watched Mila dance around the living room.

Oliveira said she is forever grateful for a team of doctors – one she credited with making her family a reality.

"If I had to I would do it again, I would in a heart beat," Oliveira said.

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