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Heart disease starts in womb

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OUR risk of developing heart disease in adulthood can be preprogrammed during our time in the womb, new research has found.

Melbourne researchers have uncovered for the first time that a common pregnancy complication — inflammation in the womb, affecting one in five pregnancies and a high-

er rate of preterm births — worsens the development of atherosclerosis, the build-up of fatty deposits in the arteries.

Hudson Institute of Medical Research scientists say their findings in animal studies give further weight to the importance of the foetal period in setting up lifelong health.

It also paves the way for counselling parents of premature babies about the lifestyle

factors their children need to address to reduce their risk of lifetime cardiovascular disease.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Tim Moss said while it had been long known that events causing inflammation — such as smoking — were associated with cardiovascular disease, it was not known how early the risk started.

The findings were published in the journal *Clinical Science*.