

# Tobacco Use and Motherhood



*Using tobacco products and being around people who use tobacco exposes you and your baby to harmful substances that may have a lasting negative impact. Smokeless tobacco and electronic cigarettes are not a natural or healthy alternative to smoking.*

## Why It's Important to Quit Before or During Pregnancy

- According to a 2001 Surgeon General's Report<sup>1</sup>, smoking by a pregnant woman accounts for up to 30 percent of all babies with low birth weight in the United States. This report also cites evidence that 3 to 8 percent of all perinatal (in the time immediately before and after birth) deaths may be attributable to maternal smoking during pregnancy.
  - o Smoking can cause problems with the placenta—the source of the baby's food and oxygen during pregnancy. For example, the placenta can separate from the womb too early, causing bleeding, which is dangerous to the mother and baby.
  - o Smoking during and after pregnancy is a risk factor for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). SIDS is an infant death for which a cause of the death cannot be found.
- There is sufficient evidence that demonstrates a mother's smoking during pregnancy can lead to persistent adverse effects on the child's lung function across their childhood.<sup>2</sup>

## Secondhand Smoke Exposure Can Harm Mom and Baby<sup>2</sup>

Secondhand smoke exposure can lead to:

- a reduction in the baby's birth weight.<sup>2</sup> Low birth weight infants may be more at risk for many health problems.
- lower respiratory illnesses in infants and children. Smoking by the mother creates the greatest increase in risk for lower respiratory illnesses.
- middle ear disease in children, including acute and recurring middle ear infection and fluid retention for more than three months.
- cough, phlegm, wheeze, breathlessness and asthma among children of school age.
- the onset of wheeze illness in early childhood.
- a lower level of lung function during childhood.

## Electronic Cigarettes, Nicotine, and Pregnancy

Electronic cigarettes (also called electronic nicotine delivery systems or e-cigarettes) contain a battery, a heating device, and a cartridge to hold liquid. The liquid typically contains nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals. The battery-powered device heats the liquid in the cartridge into an aerosol that the user inhales.

Although the aerosol generally has fewer harmful substances than cigarette smoke<sup>3</sup>, many e-cigarettes contain nicotine, which is toxic to developing fetuses and impairs fetal brain and lung development.<sup>4,5</sup>

## Alaska Mothers' Tobacco Use During Pregnancy

- Overall, cigarette use during pregnancy by Alaska mothers has decreased significantly from 22 percent in 1996 to 14 percent in 2013.<sup>6</sup> This reduction is due in large part to a decrease in smoking — from 18 percent to 8 percent — among non-Native women. However, prenatal smoking prevalence among Alaska Native women, at 31 percent in 2013, has not changed significantly.
- Approximately 50 percent of women who delivered a live birth in 2013 in Northern Alaska reported smoking cigarettes during the last three months of pregnancy.<sup>6</sup>
- Smokeless tobacco use during pregnancy is greater in Alaska than in many other states, in large part because of a high amount of use among Alaska Native women, reported at 18 percent in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Included in the products used is Iqmik (also called Blackbull), that is mistakenly believed to be safer than commercial products. Iqmik is a homemade mixture of tobacco leaf and punk ash. Punk ash is high alkaline, allowing for high levels of nicotine to be rapidly delivered to the brain, which may result in nicotine poisoning.<sup>7</sup>

## How Do I Quit?



**Call or enroll online with Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line — a FREE support service for all Alaskans! Call 1-800-784-8669 or visit [alaskaquitline.com](http://alaskaquitline.com).**

- Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line services include phone, web or text-based coaching sessions and free nicotine replacement therapy.
- Get support from friends and family. Ask Alaska's Tobacco Quit Line to send you the "Ally Guide," a guide book to give to your friends and family to support you in your quit journey.
- Contact your healthcare provider for additional help you may need to quit.

Keep trying to quit! Most tobacco users make several quit attempts before staying quit for good. You can do it. We can help.

### References

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