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Information for You from Your Health Care Team

The Dangers of Second-Hand Smoke

Now that the weather is warming and it is once again enjoyable to be outside, it is the perfect time for parents who smoke to recommit to smoking only outside the house. As a reminder of the serious problems that are caused by children being exposed to second-hand smoke, the American Academy of Pediatrics gives some sobering information about smoking. Their 1994 policy statement on creating a tobacco-free environment for children gives the following statistics: If fetuses and infants were not exposed to smoke, it is estimated that their death rate would decrease by 10%. In addition, babies would be born bigger and healthier. Smoking during pregnancy doubles the risk of a growth retarded newborn and increases the risk of spontaneous abortion and stillbirth. It is also associated with some childhood cancers. Smoking during pregnancy and exposing infants to tobacco smoke increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Children from birth to age two who are exposed to tobacco smoke have more upper respiratory tract infections, ear infections, allergic complications, bronchitis, pneumonia and asthma.

The best way to avoid all of these problems -- and save a lot of money on cigarettes and health care costs -- is to stop smoking. This will make you and your family healthier. There is a lot of help available to stop smoking, ask your doctor for some references. Your physician will be overjoyed to hear the good news.

In the meantime, here are some things you can do to reduce your child's exposure to second-hand smoke: Insist that everyone smoke outside. Smoking in another room only delays the exposure a few minutes. When you smoke, wear a smoking jacket—something you can take off and leave outside or in a closed closet. If you are exposed to smoke in your workplace, change clothes at work or as soon you get home. Remember, if children can smell smoke, the chemicals are getting into their respiratory tract and causing harm.

Each day 3,000 children in the U.S. begin to use tobacco, and 40% of them are in grade school. The best reason to stop smoking may be to set an example for your children. It will be much easier to teach your children not to smoke if you do not. If your child never takes up smoking, he or she will never have to quit.

For more information on second-hand smoke, contact:
The American Lung Association 1-800-LUNG-USA;
www.lungusa.org/tobacco/smosecondha.html

The American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org/advocacy/chmhets.htm

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