

Smoking and your premature baby

You are likely aware of the dangers of cigarette smoking to your own health. As a parent of a baby born early, you also should understand the dangers of secondhand smoke. A smoke-free environment is essential for your baby's growth and development.

Secondhand smoke

Secondhand smoke is the mixture of two things: "sidestream smoke" (smoke given off from the burning end of a tobacco product) and "mainstream smoke" (smoke breathed out by the smoker). Of the 4,000 chemicals existing in secondhand smoke, 250 of them are dangerous. Fifty of them are known to cause cancer.

- Babies' lungs are not completely mature at birth. It takes 2 to 3 years for infant lungs to develop all of the small air sacs needed for a lifetime of health.
- Tobacco smoke irritates babies' airways. It affects the growth of their lungs. While all babies can be harmed by tobacco smoke, premature babies are especially prone to lung problems when they leave the nursery.
- Exposure to tobacco smoke can make these problems worse. It can put babies born early at greater risk for serious lower airway infection and obstruction.

No level of tobacco smoke exposure is safe



The US Surgeon General has concluded that there is no safe level of exposure to cigarette smoke. In fact, exposure to the poisons in secondhand smoke can actually affect the proper growth of babies' lungs.

Breathing problems

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that secondhand smoke exposure increases the risk of acute lower respiratory infections, such as bronchiolitis and pneumonia. These infections can be caused by a virus called **respiratory syncytial virus** (RSV).

RSV is a leading cause of hospitalizations in the US for children <1 year of age. The EPA estimates that each year, between 130,000 and 150,000 cases of lower respiratory tract infections in babies up to 18 months of age can be linked to secondhand smoke exposure. Of these cases, between 7,500 and 15,000 babies need to be hospitalized.



Protecting your baby from **secondhand smoke**

Unfortunately, about 1 in 3 children lives in a home where someone smokes regularly. Several national groups, such as the US Environmental Protection Agency, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Lung Association, share the same primary recommendation:



Make your home and car smoke free



Quitting smoking is hard. Tobacco products contain nicotine, which is very addictive. Fortunately, there is help. Talk to your employer or healthcare provider about low-cost programs. You can also call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visit www.smokefree.gov for support and assistance. Or, go to www.becomeanex.org, a project of the National Alliance for Tobacco Cessation, to make a plan online to quit.

What you can do to protect your child from secondhand smoke:

- Quit!
- If you smoke and plan to breastfeed, stop smoking. Breast milk from women who smoke contains chemicals that are dangerous for babies.
- Don't let anyone smoke in your home or in your car.
- Remove ashtrays from your house. They might encourage people to smoke.
- Make sure that childcare providers do not smoke around your child.
- When you are in public with your baby, ask others not to smoke around you.