



Press Release

15th March 2010

PREGNANCY SMOKING LEVELS IN WALES HIGHEST IN THE UK

ASH Wales, the voluntary organisation in Wales leading the fight against the harmful effects of tobacco, is embracing Mother and Baby Week (15th – 21st March) by urging the 1 in 5 pregnant women who smoke throughout their pregnancy to give their baby the best start in life by seeking help and support to quit.

The consequences that smoking has on women's health have been well publicised, but the effects of smoking on their unborn child are less well known. Smoking during pregnancy is associated with a range of adverse health impacts on an unborn child including premature births, low birth weight, birth defects, miscarriage and cot death. Longer term health damage results in more respiratory illnesses and glue ear, which causes hearing problems, during the childhood years.

Smoking levels before or during pregnancy in Wales are higher than the rest of the UK. The facts are alarming. For example:-

- Women who smoke have more complications of pregnancy and labour (1.5 - 2.5 times at risk of an ectopic pregnancy and rates of miscarriage are substantially higher)
- Perinatal mortality (still-birth or death of an infant within the first four weeks of life) is increased by about one-third in babies of smokers
- Nearly a quarter of cot deaths are due to maternal smoking
- Women who smoke are twice as likely to have premature births
- Infants of parents who smoke are twice as likely to suffer from a serious respiratory infection
- Smoking during pregnancy can also increase the risk of asthma in young children

Tanya Buchanan, Chief Executive of ASH Wales, stated:

“In Wales we need to ensure that pregnant women who smoke have specific cessation and prevention programmes tailored to their needs, have appropriate referral interventions, midwives trained in tobacco cessation, and access to effective and equitable cessation services and products to support them in quitting for the benefit of their health and that of their child.

Whilst Stop Smoking Wales is currently trialing a number of initiatives to engage more effectively with pregnant smokers, it remains the case that there is currently, a lack of systematic service delivery to support pregnant smokers to quit right across Wales.”

Although it can be hard to give up smoking, the benefits of quitting can be felt immediately and as a mother you are giving your child the best possible start in life and the chance of a healthier future. In the longer term quitting will not only reduce your risk of chronic illness, disability or death, but you will also be protecting the health of the people you care about by protecting them from your secondhand smoke.

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Please refer all press enquiries to: Carole Jones, ASH Wales at carole@ashwales.co.uk or Tel 02920641101 or 07593538076

ASH Wales is the only voluntary organisation in Wales with the sole task of tackling the ill health caused by tobacco use. Our main aim is to achieve a reduction in, and eventual elimination of, the health problems associated with tobacco use. Further information can be found at: www.ashwales.co.uk.

ASH Wales was established in 1976 as a branch of ASH UK. In 2007 ASH Wales became an independent company limited by guarantee and a charity registered in Wales.