

## FACT SHEET #9C

### GOOD HEALTH BEFORE AND DURING PREGNANCY MAY HELP WOMEN TO PREVENT PRETERM BIRTH AND HAVE HEALTHIER PREGNANCY OUTCOMES

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#### *ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS*

##### **SMOKING**

If a woman decides to plan a pregnancy or think you she may be pregnant, **she should stop smoking and avoid being around others who smoke or secondhand smoke.**

- Smoking increases the possibility of: preterm birth, miscarriage, stillbirth, bleeding problems, abnormalities of the placenta
- Babies born to smoking mothers are at high risk for stunted growth, breathing problems and asthma, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and behavior and learning problems
- The use of birth control pills combined with cigarette smoking dramatically increases the risk of cardiovascular problems, especially blood clots in the mother
- Secondhand smoke is a dangerous health hazard to everyone, especially unborn babies, infants, and children. It can badly damage their smaller, less developed lungs and brain
- Health care professional can help with quitting smoking. There is also help at the Kentucky Quit-line 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669)

##### **ALCOHOL**

If a woman decides to plan a pregnancy or thinks she may be pregnant, **she should stop drinking alcohol.**

- Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is a serious health problem that can tragically affect a baby before it's born. Fetal alcohol syndrome is a life-long disability that can be totally prevented if a woman doesn't drink during her pregnancy.
- Alcohol kills brain cells, and the body has made the adult number of brain cells by about 20 weeks gestation. Drinking alcohol while the brain is developing will permanently decrease the number of brain cells in the baby.
- Babies with FAS tend to weigh less and be shorter than normal and usually suffer from:
  - Smaller heads
  - Deformed facial features
  - Abnormal joints and limbs
  - Poor coordination

- Problems with learning and memory
- Mental health problems and mental retardation
- School failure
- Trouble with the law
- Alcohol and drug problems

**Fetal alcohol syndrome is the most common known preventable cause of mental retardation.** Also, alcohol and caffeine can prevent the absorption of folic acid and iron that is needed during pregnancy. There is no safe amount of alcohol that women can consume during pregnancy, and it's also recommended that no more than 2 cups of caffeine-containing beverages (coffees, teas, colas, hot chocolate) be consumed per day during pregnancy.

### **OTHER ILLEGAL/RECREATIONAL DRUGS**

Pregnant women should avoid the use of any and all illegal or recreational drugs during pregnancy. Taking drugs such as narcotics, amphetamine, methadone, oxycontin, cocaine, heroin, and other similar drugs cause effects on the mother's pregnancy and the baby. These drugs cause increased fetal death, placental abruption, and decreased blood flow to the fetus, premature delivery, and poor nutrition. The drugs do pass to the developing baby, and have been associated with birth defects such as cleft palate, heart defects, and other anomalies. Babies may go through severe withdrawal after birth, even seizures. Drug-exposed babies are more likely to die of SIDS. Babies exposed to marijuana are more likely to develop leukemia in childhood. The effects of prenatal drug exposure on the baby's developing brain are often not seen until school age, when the children have difficulty with behavior, self-control, and learning.

### **WHERE TO GET HELP:**

- Community Mental Health Centers: 1-888-729-8028
  - Help for depression, anger management, substance abuse, crisis management
- Smoking Cessation Quit Line: 1-800-784-8669
  - Trained to work with pregnant smokers
- Domestic Violence Abuse Hotline: 1-800-752-6200
- WIC nutrition program: 1-800-462-6122
  - Help for low income women pregnant or nursing and their babies and young children
- HANDS Home: 502-564-3756
  - Visiting program for overburdened first time parents, smoking cessation counseling or classes