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**STUDY FINDS INCREASED CIGARETTE TAXES DETER PREGNANT WOMEN
FROM SMOKING, EVEN THOSE WITH HIGH SMOKING RATES**

***Pregnant Women Found to Be More Responsive to Cigarette Taxes
Than General Population***

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 31, 2001) – Increased cigarette excise taxes can substantially reduce smoking rates among all groups of pregnant women, even those with high smoking rates, reports a new study released today. The study will appear in the November issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* and is the largest to date on the impact of higher taxes on smoking during pregnancy. The study was funded by the Substance Abuse Policy Research Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Many state legislatures are considering tax hikes across the country. The study reports that a tax hike of 55 cents per pack would cut smoking rates among pregnant women nationwide by about 22 percent.

“The results in this paper provide further evidence that excise taxes on cigarettes reduce maternal smoking rates by a statistically significant and quantitatively important amount,” said William N. Evans, Ph.D., Professor at the University of Maryland, and a coauthor of the study. “This effect appears to be larger than the smoking rate decreases we see in the general population following cigarette tax hikes. It occurs for all groups of pregnant women regardless of age, ethnicity, education, or marital status.”

The study examined roughly 20 million births between 1989 and 1995 from the Natality Detail File, an annual, state-by-state birth census compiled by the National Center for Health Statistics. The Natality Detail File relies on self-reporting to indicate whether the mother smoked during her pregnancy. Of the 20 million cases examined, 16.5 percent of mothers reported having smoked during pregnancy. The researchers examined the smoking rates of pregnant women before and after a state raised their cigarette tax, and compared these changes to smoking rates in states that had no such change.

“Smoking rates often fall when women become pregnant,” said Evans. “But, what we found is that in states that instituted a tax hike, smoking rates among pregnant women dropped a lot faster than in states which did not change taxes. States like Arizona, Michigan, and Massachusetts saw large drops in smoking rates as soon as their tax hikes went into effect.”

The study cites findings from the U.S. Surgeon General that maternal smoking during pregnancy doubles the chance of an infant having low birth weight. Maternal smoking also is widely viewed as a preventable cause of sudden infant death syndrome, a risk factor for ectopic pregnancy and spontaneous abortion, and a predictor of neonatal mortality.

The lower smoking rates generated by higher taxes should help reduce the smoking-related complications among pregnant women and their infants. As a result, “the health care cost savings that one sees with higher tobacco taxes are seen in a matter of a few months in the case of pregnant women,” said Evans.

“Today’s study clearly shows us that cigarette tax hikes can be used as a tool to fight low birth weight in this country,” said Jeanne S. Ringel, Ph.D., Associate Economist, RAND Corporation and coauthor of the study. “Since many pregnant women are already motivated to quit, interventions such as cigarette tax hikes may be more effective during pregnancy than at any other point in a woman’s life.”

Even among subgroups of pregnant women who smoked heavily, the study found large drops in smoking. For example, a 55 cent tax hike is estimated to reduce smoking for women under age 30, unmarried, and lower-educated women—all who have particularly high smoking rates—by 11 to 15 percent. The groups most responsive to an increase in excise taxes were white, older, married, and highly-educated women, who are estimated to reduce smoking by 25 to 40 percent with the tax hike.

“Excise taxes reduce smoking rates among all the groups studied, and the impact is large among all the groups,” said Evans. “However, those who are the most sensitive to price increases are also those groups who are already motivated to stop smoking during pregnancy.”

“We also found that, contrary to recent reports, teen mothers are very sensitive to higher cigarettes prices,” said Ringel. “We estimate that a 55 cent tax hike would reduce smoking rates by 16 percent among teen mothers.”

The Substance Abuse Policy Research Program (SAPRP) is a \$54 million program that funds studies into public and private policies affecting alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, based in Princeton, N.J., is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care. It concentrates its grant making in four goal areas: to assure that all Americans have access to basic health care at reasonable cost; to improve care and support for people with chronic health conditions; to promote healthy communities and lifestyles; and to reduce the personal, social and economic harm caused by substance abuse -- tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs.

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