

## WHAT ARE YOU BREATHING DURING PREGNANCY?

Secondhand smoke is the smoke given off by a cigarette, cigar or pipe combined with the smoke exhaled by a smoker. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that breathing other people's smoke can cause disease, disability and even death.

Secondhand smoke is more dangerous than previously thought. It is responsible for up to 65,000 deaths each year in the U.S. For every eight smokers who die from tobacco-related disease, one nonsmoker also dies from exposure to secondhand smoke (*CDC, 2004*). These figures do not include the thousands of youth and adults who experience illness from exposure to tobacco smoke.

Why is secondhand smoke so dangerous? Classified as a Group A carcinogen or cancer causing substance by the Environmental Protection Agency, secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are considered dangerous toxins. It is considered the nation's number one airborne carcinogen with no safe level of exposure (*EPA, 1992*) Air pollution from secondhand smoke is ten times greater than diesel car exhaust (*British Medical Journal, 2004*).

Secondhand smoke affects all of us; however there are certain people who are especially vulnerable to its harmful effects, including pregnant women, infants and young children, school-age youth, anyone with asthma and other respiratory conditions, adults with heart disease and the elderly.

A pregnant woman who breathes in secondhand smoke exposes her baby to all the toxins present in the smoke. Nicotine constricts blood vessels, decreasing blood supply to the baby, and carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas in smoke, reduces the amount of oxygen delivered to the baby. Unborn babies exposed to secondhand smoke are at increased risk for:

- Prematurity (being born too early)
- Low birth weight
- Developmental and/or learning problems
- Decreased lung function and respiratory problems such as asthma
- SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) in the first year of life

To learn more about secondhand smoke and what you can do to protect yourself and you baby, visit Smoke Free Union's website at [www.smokefreeunion.com](http://www.smokefreeunion.com) or call 704-283-3539 for an informational packet.