



Secondhand Smoke Exposure in Pregnant Women Can Cause Oral Birth Defect

A recent Norwegian study shows that women who are frequently subjected to secondhand smoke increase the risk of giving birth to a child with a cleft lip or cleft palate.

These two common birth defects develop when tissues that shape the roof or the mouth and upper lip do not form correctly during the fifth and ninth week of pregnancy. When women are exposed to secondhand smoke in the first trimester of their pregnancy, the odds of these birth defects arising increase.

A research team, led by Dr. Rolv T. Lie of the University of Bergen in Norway, reported in the journal *Epidemiology* that nonsmoking women exposed to secondhand smoke for at least two hours each day increased the risk of these birth defects by 60 percent. Researchers found that the odds increased regardless of the infant's genes.



Previous studies have linked maternal smoking to these two birth defects. The new findings show that even nonsmoking mothers are putting their child at a much greater risk by being exposed to secondhand smoke.