

Earlier puberty linked to mother's smoking during pregnancy

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If a mother smokes during pregnancy, there is a risk of her children starting puberty earlier. This is shown by a major study from Aarhus University, which has just been published in the international journal *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

"We found that [children](#) of mothers who had smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day during pregnancy, on average entered [puberty](#) three to six months earlier than the children of non-smokers," says Ph.D. student Nis Brix, who is one of the researchers behind the study.

The study is one of the largest puberty studies worldwide, and the results are based on the survey "Better health for generations" from the Statens Serum Institut in Denmark.

May lead to diseases later

A total of 15,819 pregnant [women](#) and their children participated in the study. During pregnancy, the women were asked about their smoking habits. Then, the children were followed and filled in 83,810 questionnaires about their pubertal development from the age of eleven and every six months thereafter.

The researchers find early puberty worrisome.

"Early puberty can be associated with an increased risk of a number of diseases as an adult, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer," says Nis Brix. Together with his colleagues, he is working to identify the causes of puberty to be able to prevent it occurring.

"It is known that smoking is harmful to the unborn foetus. Smoking is, among other things, associated with an increased risk of low birth weight, premature birth and increased mortality. There are thus a wide range of other good reasons to give up smoking before [pregnancy](#). We hope that our results can be used as another motivating factor to stop [smoking](#) among women who are planning on becoming pregnant," says Nis Brix.

More information: Nis Brix et al, Maternal Smoking During Pregnancy and Timing of Puberty in Sons and Daughters: A Population-Based Cohort Study, *American Journal of Epidemiology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1093/aje/kwy206](https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwy206)

Provided by Aarhus University

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