

Smoking in pregnancy has declined by a third since 2016

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There's good news for American mothers-to-be and their newborns:

Rates of smoking during pregnancy have fallen by 36% since 2016, a new report finds.

The percentage of pregnant women who smoked was already low in 2016 compared to decades past: 7.2%. But by 2021, that rate had fallen to just 4.6%. That's according to the latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Keeping tobacco toxins away from the developing fetus is crucial to infant health.

According to the [March of Dimes](#), smoking while pregnant has been linked to higher risks of miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, [ectopic pregnancy](#), [birth defects](#) and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), among other harms.

The new data comes from a [national database](#) which is sourced, in part, by information provided by U.S. mothers around the time of their deliveries.

Researchers led by the NCHS' [Joyce Martin](#) reported that "the percentage of mothers who smoked during pregnancy declined across all maternal age groups between 2016 and 2021." Declines were seen regardless of race or ethnicity and they occurred across the nation.

Overall, Martin's team calculated that rates of smoking during pregnancy fell by an average of 8% per year between 2016 and 2021. The pandemic year of 2020-2021 brought a particularly steep decline of 16%, they noted.

Young mothers—those under 30—saw the steepest declines. For those under 20, the rate of smoking while pregnant was cut nearly in half

(47%) over the study period. However, even in the face of that decline, [younger women](#) are still more likely to smoke during a pregnancy than their older peers, the study authors noted.

Where a woman lived in America appeared to matter, with wide variance observed between states.

For example, while less than 1% of pregnant women in California smoked during 2021, 18.2% of [pregnant women](#) did so in West Virginia. Rates were also relatively high in Kentucky (12.7%), Missouri (10.1%) and Arkansas (9.5%).

While smoking during pregnancy appears to be at an all-time low, more must be done to safeguard women and newborns, experts say.

In its advisory to women, the March of Dimes noted that, "when you smoke during [pregnancy](#), chemicals like nicotine, [carbon monoxide](#) and tar pass through the placenta and umbilical cord to your baby. These chemicals are harmful to your baby. They can lessen the amount of oxygen that your baby gets. This can slow your baby's growth before birth and can damage your baby's lungs and brain."

The group also stressed the danger to infants posed by secondhand smoke.

"Babies exposed to [secondhand smoke](#) are more likely than babies who aren't to die of SIDS," the group said, and "they're also at risk for health problems" including asthma, bronchitis and ear infections.

The new report was published Jan. 31 as an [NCHS Data Brief](#).

More information: Find out more about the dangers of smoking during pregnancy at the [American College of Obstetricians and](#)

[Gynecologists.](#)

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