

Smoking while pregnant risks academic achievement of unborn babies, says study

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Smoking harms almost every part of your body. But if you smoke when pregnant, the toxic chemicals in tobacco will also harm your unborn baby, with new research showing that it could lead to reduced academic

outcomes at school.

The research is [published](#) in the journal *Addictive Behaviors*.

In a [systematic review](#) of 19 studies and 1.25 million participants, researchers at the University of South Australia along with a team at Curtin University, SAHMRI, Harvard University and others, found that 79% of studies reported reduced academic achievement in children exposed to maternal prenatal smoking.

An additional meta-analysis of eight primary studies with 723,877 participants showed that children exposed to maternal prenatal tobacco smoking were 49% more likely to struggle with poor [academic achievement](#), in comparison to those who had not been exposed to smoking in utero.

In Australia, 8.7% (or 26,433) of all mothers who gave birth in 2021 smoked at some time during their pregnancy.

Lead researcher, UniSA's Dr. Bereket Duko, says that despite what is already known about smoking, research is still uncovering additional negative effects.

"For decades, agencies across the globe have pushed anti-smoking campaigns about the dangers of smoking. But despite these efforts, [tobacco smoking](#) remains a pervasive global public health issue," Dr. Bereket says. "Prenatal smoking is known to cause multiple pregnancy complications, including a higher risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, restricted growth and development, and serious birth defects. It is also linked with adverse mental health outcomes and behavioral issues.

"Our new research adds to this, by showing that maternal prenatal smoking has a significant risk of limiting a child's academic

performance, putting them well behind their peers at school. We all want children to have the best start in life. But clearly, we must do better to educate mothers and families about the noxious effects of smoking while pregnant on mother and baby.

"Remember, the fight against smoking is not one we have already won. Yes, we have made big steps to reduce the number of people smoking, and we have made many aware of the [health risks](#). But this is an ongoing battle, and we must continue to educate people about the dangers of tobacco so that the next generations do not unnecessarily suffer."

More information: Bereket Duko et al, The effect of maternal prenatal tobacco smoking on offspring academic achievement: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Addictive Behaviors* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2024.107985](#)

Provided by University of South Australia

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