

The majority of First Breath Participants (86%) successfully abstain, quit, or reduce their tobacco usage during pregnancy. One of the most common challenges to quitting is being around other smokers. You may have heard a participant say 'Everyone I know smokes.' Even if she is able to quit, she is still exposed to second and third hand smoke by her friends and family. We know that smoking is associated with poor birth outcomes, but what do we know about how second and third-hand smoke affects our health, and the health of the women and families we serve?



Second Hand Smoke (SHS) (sometimes called 'passive smoke' or 'environmental tobacco smoke') has been classified as a known carcinogen by the Environmental Protection Agency. It consists of both the mainstream smoke (smoke exhaled by the smoker), as well as side-stream smoke (the smoke that comes off the lit cigarette). But just how much of an impact does SHS have on our health? This has been a difficult question to answer in the past, due to relying solely on self-reporting and memory recall for information collection, however there has always been a strong connection between SHS and SIDS, childhood asthma, respiratory and ear infections in young children. An interesting way to approach this question today is to look at what happens when people are less likely to be exposed to SHS in public. One well designed [study](#) from the Mayo Clinic looked at the impact of a smoke free workplace law in Olmsted County, Minnesota. When comparing the 18 months prior to the law to after its implementation, incidence of heart attacks among the population dropped by one third.

More specific to the population we work with, an article published in the Lancet earlier this year found benefits to prenatal health from public smoking bans as well. The [article](#) examined 11 research studies and found that, in the first year following a public smoking ban, there was a 10% decrease in preterm births, as well as a 5% decrease in low birth weight babies. Public smoking bans, either by reducing a population's exposure to SHS, or reducing the number of pregnant women smoking, does seem to improve the health and wellbeing of both pregnant women, as well as young children.

In addition to SHS, there is also the concern of Third Hand Smoke (THS). THS is the residual nicotine and other toxic chemicals that are deposited onto surfaces when exposed to tobacco smoke. THS has only recently come into the public's eye, however the initial findings have been concerning. Known carcinogens in SHS are [still present in THS](#). There are concerns that THS may be even more carcinogenic (than SHS), due to the chemicals of SHS continuing to interact and undergo chemical reactions with the environment. There have been studies examining THS that have actually found new carcinogens that we

weren't [previously aware of](#). This is especially concerning to those with new babies in the house, as babies can be exposed to higher doses of the chemicals of SHS through THS, even if nobody has ever smoked around them.

It is also important to be aware that THS cannot be removed simply by "airing out the room", opening windows, using a fan while smoking, or only smoking in certain areas of the house. Also, THS seems to stick around for months, if not years. This is especially important for those who are living in apartments, as even if you didn't smoke in an apartment, the previous tenants may have.

These topics can be difficult to address with the women we serve though, as they already likely have their own opinions and thoughts on the issue.

Some important steps to keep in mind when discussing SHS and THS:

1. Affirm any changes or attempts to change that are being made.

"You mentioned that your boyfriend goes outside to smoke now, that's a great step forward. What led to this change?"

2. Ask about additional steps she's interested in taking.

"It sounds like you already know a lot about second hand smoke. What else were you planning to do to cut down on your exposure?"

3. Ask for permission to offer suggestions and next steps, if she is interested.

"Is it okay if I offer a few other ways you can work to protect your kids from second and third hand smoke?"

- If she can, ask all guests to take their smoking outside, even if the kids aren't around.
- If she is not in the position to ask others to take their smoking outside, at least making sure that the baby's room and belongings are smoke-free.
- Make your car a smoke-free environment.
- Make sure that anyone who smokes washes their hands and changes clothes (if possible) before handling your baby.

Anytime share information, especially with something as abstract as THS, it is important to deliver your message with clear, concise language.