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The Royal College of
Midwives

England

Dear Heads of Midwifery,

Reducing smoking in pregnancy – the importance of Carbon Monoxide screening

As you know Midwifery staff are key to addressing this issue. They are in the best position to identify women who are smoking early in their pregnancy, discuss why they are concerned and refer them to the Local Stop Smoking Service. To date much has been achieved and we thank you for all your input and help as midwifery leaders to date. However, rates of smoking during pregnancy are gradually reducing but still remain unacceptably high given the impact on both the unborn child and the woman herself. The most recent figures suggest that around 76,000 babies were born to mothers who smoke in the last year.

We all understand that women sometimes find it difficult to tell health professionals that they smoke so NICE has recommended that all women should be screened for carbon monoxide (CO) at the booking appointment (<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph26>). CO screening also assesses whether a woman has been exposed to unsafe levels of carbon monoxide from other sources such as faulty cooking and heating appliances.

If you have already implemented CO screening or are planning to do so, we are pleased to tell you that there are some new resources that may help, and all are available free of charge. These are designed to support those undertaking the screening and to explain to women why it is important.

A copy of **“Carbon Monoxide Screening: advice for health professionals”** is available for all members of your midwifery team and the **“Test your Breath”** postcard is available for women who book to receive their pregnancy care from your Trust over the next year. These materials are supported by a range of organisations concerned about ensuring women have a healthy pregnancy. An example of each is attached to this email.

To access these materials for your staff and pregnant women please contact the Tobacco Control Collaborating Centre on: 01926 49011 or by email to: mmcmillan@pmaresearch.co.uk who will arrange delivery. They will also be distributed through several professional publications, including Midwives magazine, over the coming months.

We recommend that midwifery staff access an additional publication available to assist with enhancing the knowledge and skills of midwifery teams in relation to smoking. The National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training has recently updated **“Smoking Cessation: a briefing for midwifery staff”**, which provides concise guidance on how to deliver Very Brief Advice (VBA) to pregnant women who smoke and how to carry out routine CO screening with all pregnant women. An electronic version is attached here and further copies can be ordered or downloaded from the NCSCT website (www.ncsct.co.uk).

Smoking remains the main modifiable risk factor for a safe pregnancy. The RCM remains committed to support the profession's action to reduce the number of women who continue to smoke whilst pregnant. We hope these resources will assist in supporting midwifery staff to raise this important issue with the women they work with and signpost where help for those who need it can be found.

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