

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Contact:**

Chelsie Smith, RN, BSN

715-839-4718

Smith.Chelsalyn@co.eau-claire.wi.us**New Report: Many Eau Claire Women Still Smoking During Pregnancy**

Eau Claire, WI, May 6th, 2016 – In Eau Claire County, over 15% of pregnant women smoke during their pregnancy, this is higher than the State’s rate of 14%, and the national rate of 9%. A study published this week from the UW-Milwaukee Center for Urban Initiatives and Research shows that Wisconsin is struggling to reduce the smoking rate for pregnant women in the state. According to researchers, the smoking rate for pregnant women in Wisconsin has remained around 13-14% for the last decade.

“The fact that our County’s rate of tobacco use during pregnancy is higher than the state rate, is concerning to our community,” says Chelsie Smith, Public Health Nurse. “Many factors can play into as to why it’s higher in our community. Smoking being a ‘social norm’ and the increased difficulty in quitting smoking are challenges,” says Smith.

One of the key indicators detailed in the report for whether a woman smokes during pregnancy is education. The report shows that compared to women with a college degree, women with only a partial college education are 8 times more likely to smoke during pregnancy, while pregnant women with only a high school education or less are 14 times more likely to smoke. Of the 1,255 births in Eau Claire County in 2014, 277 of them were from mothers with a high school education and 33.6% of them smoked throughout their pregnancy, whereas; 305 of the 1,255 births were to mothers with college degrees and only 3% of them smoked during their pregnancy.

While smoking during pregnancy can lead to issues like low birth weight and higher infant deaths, many pregnant women continue to smoke because the pull of the addiction. Many also see it as a way to relieve stress, or struggle to quit when their support networks continue to use tobacco products.

Thankfully, Wisconsin has a proven program to help pregnant Wisconsin women quit smoking. The Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation’s (WWHF) First Breath program partners with nearly 1,000 prenatal care providers across the state, including the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. Program participants receive one-on-one counseling, personalized quit plans, small gifts, and text message support. “First Breath provides critical support for these women,” said Krissy Alaniz, manager for the WWHF. “Most women want to quit, but wanting to quit and having the tools to overcome an incredibly powerful addiction are two very different things.”

The Eau Claire City-County Health Department’s public health nurses have been offering the First Breath program through their prenatal care coordination program, Healthy Beginnings+ for several years. In 2015, 38 women were enrolled into the program. The Health Department has been recognized for outstanding contribution to the First Breath program.

For more information about tobacco prevention efforts in Eau Claire County, contact the Eau Claire City-County Health Department. All tobacco users can also call 1-800-QUIT NOW for free help. To learn more about the First Breath program call 800-448-5148 or visit www.wwhf.org

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