

Pregnancy smoking cessation program now in Northeast Colo.

Written by Deanna Herbert

Rocky Mountain Health Plans (RMHP) Foundation has expanded its program to help pregnant women quit smoking, and the Northeast Colorado Health Department has joined in the effort.

“We were awarded nearly a half million dollars from The Colorado Health Foundation to take a proven program statewide over three years,” says Lisa Fenton Free, executive director, Rocky Mountain Health Plans Foundation. “We have had much success in the first year getting women to stop smoking during their pregnancy and after delivery.”

As the second year of the program is implemented in 2009, 22 additional counties will be participating including Morgan, Logan, Phillips and Sedgwick. Washington and Yuma counties started this program on year one.

Pregnant smokers can be referred to the program by their local physician, clinic, health department, WIC clinic or by self referral. The program requires that women complete four counseling sessions and quit smoking, which is confirmed by a carbon monoxide (CO) monitor test at their local participating facility. After giving birth, they return monthly for CO monitoring and counseling.

“Every month that the mother remains tobacco-free, she receives a \$25 voucher for diapers,” says Janice Ferguson, program coordinator. “The baby of a nonsmoking mother gets a better start in life and the whole family benefits from having a smoke-free environment.”

“Smoking during pregnancy is the single most preventable cause of death and illness in infants,” says Fenton Free. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports smoking during pregnancy increases the risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and low birth weight. In the year 2000, a review of 20 studies, published in a leading obstetric journal, found pregnant women who smoke are approximately 27 percent more likely to deliver prematurely than those who don’t smoke.

“Low birth weight newborns more often require extended stays in neonatal intensive care units,” Fenton Free says, “and health problems don’t end when the baby goes home. Low birth weight is associated with long-term disabilities—cerebral palsy, autism, mental retardation, vision and hearing impairments and developmental disabilities,” she says.

“Low birth weight and related complications take a heavy emotional and financial toll,” Ferguson says. “Getting women to stop smoking both during and after their pregnancy is one of the most effective steps we can take.”

Living in a smoke-free home lessens an infant’s exposure to second hand smoke. Babies who breathe secondhand smoke have more colds, ear infections and asthma attacks.

The program is already operating in Alamosa, Baca, Chaffee, Delta, Fremont, Grand, Jackson, Las Animas, Mesa, Moffat, Montrose, Ouray, Prowers, Rio Blanco, Rio Grande, Routt, Summit and Weld counties, with implementation in most of the remaining Colorado counties by 2010.

The grant, secured by Rocky Mountain Health Plans Foundation from The Colorado Health Foundation, funds training and compensation to county program coordinators, the purchase of CO monitors, client handouts, marketing materials and diaper vouchers.

To find out more about this program in Northeastern Colorado contact Sherree Bustos, STEPP Coordinator, Northeastern Colorado Health Department, 228 W. Railroad Avenue, Fort Morgan, Colorado 80701 or call 970-867-4918 ext. 233.