

## Jodi McKay

Minister for Tourism  
Minister for the Hunter  
Minister for Small Business  
Minister for Science and Medical Research  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)



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### **The smoking gun- maternal smoking and childhood cancers**

New research by the Cancer Institute NSW has provided the strongest indication yet that smoking during pregnancy increases a child's likelihood of developing cancer.

Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer) Jodi McKay said this is the kind of information that all mums-to-be need to know.

Smoking during pregnancy is proven to cause:

- Lower birth weight
- Premature birth
- Admission of the baby to a neonatal intensive care unit

"Through this new research we have credible evidence that these known birth complications associated with smoking during pregnancy could also increase the risk of childhood cancers," Ms McKay said.

The Cancer Institute linked the records of all births in NSW between 1994 and 2005 with cases of cancer in NSW children over the same period.\* Of the 1.05 million recorded births, there were 948 cases of childhood cancer.

Leukaemia and cancers of the nerves and central nervous system were found to be more common in babies born prematurely and in those with a lower birth weight. Cancers were also more common in babies admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit.

Babies born with a low birth-weight have 1.7 times the risk of developing leukaemia and 1.8 times the risk of developing cancers of the central nervous system and brain cancers. Those born prematurely are twice as likely to be diagnosed with cancer.

Babies admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit are at the greatest risk of developing cancer. They are 2.7 times more likely to be diagnosed with cancer, and 3.7 more likely to develop cancer of the central nervous system and brain cancers, 4 times more likely to develop eye cancer and 5 times more likely to get kidney cancer.

"This research has revealed something of a smoking gun – while more research is needed to conclusively link smoking during pregnancy with childhood cancers the negative birth outcomes associated with smoking are the same as those that increase the risk of developing childhood cancers.

"Everybody knows that smoking causes cancer, stroke, heart disease and emphysema, but all mothers and mums-to-be should also understand the potential damage to a child caused by prenatal smoking.

“Around 17 per cent of women smoke during pregnancy. It’s an alarming statistic and one that needs to change.”

Ms McKay is calling on mums-to-be to quit smoking instead of becoming one of the statistics.

“Quitting is hard but not quitting is harder. Women, and men, trying to quit smoking can contact the Quitline or talk to their GP about the latest products, which can aid quitting by 2 to 3 times.”

\*Birth data is contained in the NSW Midwives Data Collection, which is a statewide system that monitors patterns of pregnancy care, services and pregnancy outcomes. It covers all births in NSW (all live born babies and stillbirths of at least 20 weeks gestation or 400 grams birth weight. Cancer data is collected by the NSW Cancer Registry, which receives notifications of cancer in NSW.

***Media Contact: Lee Davelaar 0418 269 508***