

On The Other Hand...

New moms warned about 'third-hand' smoke

By Steve Biehn, Staff Writer

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Ardmore, OK —

The Carter County Turning Point Tobacco Coalition and Mercy Memorial Health Center have joined forces to remind new mothers of the importance of protecting their children against the dangers of second- and third-hand smoke.

Second-hand smoke is a mixture of the smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, pipe or cigar and the smoke exhaled from a smoker's lungs. Exposure to secondhand smoke is sometimes called involuntary, or passive, smoking. Second-hand smoke is a known cause of cancer in humans and may lead to heart disease and stroke. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Health, passive smoking is estimated to cause more than 700 deaths in Oklahoma among nonsmokers each year.

Third-hand smoke is the tobacco contamination that remains after a cigarette has been put out. Exposure to low levels of tobacco smoke has been shown to affect the neurological development of children. Small children especially are susceptible to third-hand smoke exposure because they crawl on the floor, suck on their fingers and breathe in the invisible tobacco particulates that have settled on the parents' or caretakers' hair and clothing.

Carter County Tobacco Use Prevention Coordinator Janie Horton said the organization, with input from a number of healthcare professionals, decided to promote smoke-free homes by providing a baby T-shirt or towel and an information packet for all new mothers who give birth at MMHC's Family Birthplace. The project is funded through a \$3,500 grant from the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust.

"It is important that this gift and the information packet convey the message we want to go home with those new babies and mothers — that keeping (your) baby smoke-free will have an immediate and lasting benefit," Horton said via e-mail. "We hope it gives both smoking and non-smoking mothers a way to gently remind others not to smoke around their babies."

"We have a smoke-free campus," said Shanna Hammond, from Mercy Memorial Health Center Corporate Communications. "We just thought it was something natural for us to partner with them on."

Horton said the baby items' message and design were inspired by Plainview High School student Chloe Thompson's creative approach to convincing her father, James, to stop using tobacco three years ago. Thompson wrote anti-tobacco messages on sticky notes and strategically placed them around the house where her father couldn't miss them. The messages all ended with "Remember I love you," with a hand-drawn heart in place of the word "love."

Holly Tynes, RN, assistant manager of the Family Birthplace, said the nurses are all supportive of the project.

“I think this is the first time since 1997 or 1998 that none of our staff members smoke,” she said. “And we do advocate that, especially on this floor.”

More than 30 percent of all cancer deaths in the United States are tobacco-related. Each year, an estimated 5,700 Oklahomans die as a direct result of their tobacco use. Some 14 percent of all Medicaid spending is related to smoking, which costs estimated an \$170 million annually in Oklahoma.

Steve Biehn, 221-6546
steve.biehn@ardmoreite.com