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The Chronicle

A Paterson Counseling Center Newsletter

How Drugs Impact Pregnancy

Marijuana:

- **Common slang names:** pot, weed, grass and reefer
- **What happens when a pregnant woman smokes marijuana?** Marijuana crosses the placenta to your baby. Marijuana, like cigarette smoke, contains toxins that keep your baby from getting the proper supply of oxygen that he or she needs to grow.

How can marijuana affect the baby? Studies of marijuana in pregnancy are inconclusive because many women who smoke marijuana also use tobacco and alcohol. Smoking marijuana increases the levels of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide in the blood, which reduces the oxygen supply to the baby. Smoking marijuana during pregnancy can increase the chance of miscarriage, low birth weight, premature births, developmental delays, and behavioral and learning problems.

What if I smoked marijuana before I knew I was pregnant? According to Dr. Richard S. Abram, author of *Will it Hurt the Baby*, "occasional use of marijuana during the first trimester is unlikely to cause birth defects." Once you are aware you are pregnant, you should stop smoking. Doing this will decrease the chance of harming your baby.

Cocaine:

- **Common slang names:** bump, toot, C, coke, crack, flake, snow, and candy
- **What happens when a pregnant woman consumes cocaine?** Cocaine crosses the placenta and enters your baby's circulation. The elimination of cocaine is slower in a fetus than in an adult. This means that cocaine remains in the baby's body much longer than it does in your body.

How can cocaine affect my baby? According to the Organization of Teratology Information Services (OTIS), during the early months of pregnancy cocaine exposure may increase the risk of miscarriage. Later in pregnancy, cocaine use can cause placental abruption. Placental abruption can lead to severe bleeding, preterm birth, and fetal death. OTIS also states that the risk of birth defects appears to be greater when the mother has used cocaine frequently during pregnancy.

According to the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecology (ACOG), women who use cocaine during their pregnancy have a 25 % increased chance of premature labor. Babies born to mothers who use cocaine throughout their pregnancy may also have a smaller head and be growth restricted. Babies who are exposed to cocaine later in pregnancy may be born dependent and suffer from withdrawal symptoms such as tremors, sleeplessness, muscle spasms, and feeding difficulties. Some experts believe that learning difficulties may result as the child gets older. Defects of the genitals, kidneys, and brain are also possible.

What if I consumed cocaine before I knew I was pregnant? There have not been any conclusive studies done on single doses of cocaine during pregnancy. Birth defects and other side effects are usually a result of prolonged use, but because studies are inconclusive, it is best to avoid cocaine altogether. Cocaine is a very addictive drug and experimentation often leads to abuse of the drug.