Prenatal Smokeless Tobacco and Iq’mik Use in Alaska

During 2004–2005, the prevalence of prenatal iq’mik or spit tobacco use among Alaska Native and Non-Native women was 16.6% and 1.2%, respectively (RR, 14.2; 95% CI, 5.9 to 33.9). Among Alaska Native women, iq’mik or spit use increased to 20.8% during 2005 (p=0.07). During 2004–2005, compared to other age groups, teens (7.9%) and women age 35+ years (6.5%) had the highest prevalences of prenatal iq’mik or spit tobacco use. Among iq’mik users and spit users, respectively, 54.4% and 39.2% reported prenatal use of <1 can during an average week (range: 0–5 cans of iq’mik, and 0–7 cans of spit tobacco).

Discussion

Though Alaska Native women account for about 25% of Alaska’s births (7), they account for nearly 95% of the prenatal iq’mik or spit tobacco users. Mothers residing in Southwest Alaska have a particularly high use rate. The historical and cultural basis for this concentration of use among this group of Alaska women is not known. Although chew tobacco may contribute to nicotine addiction and adverse effects on the fetus, Alaska Native women report few perceived health effects, which may contribute to continued use (8). To increase in prenatal chew use among Alaska Native women from 2004 to 2005 and the higher prevalence among teenage mothers represent worrisome findings that require ongoing monitoring.

Recommendations

1. Tobacco prevention and cessation programs should target Alaska Native women of childbearing age who reside in Southwest Alaska. These efforts can be guided by the evidence-based model for comprehensive tobacco control programs developed by the CDC at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/.

2. Health care and public health professionals working with this population should emphasize the dangers associated with prenatal iq’mik and other smokeless tobacco use and should familiarize themselves with the following currently available resources:

   • Free tobacco cessation help is available through the Alaska Tobacco Quit Line: 888-SMOKES (7848).
   • The Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program has statewide resources: www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/smokeless
   • The Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bristol Bay Area Health Corporations has several programs and resources: www.vkhc.org/708.cfm, www.bbahc.org/tobacco.html
   • The American Cancer Society gives tips on how to quit chew use http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_13X_Quitting_Smokeless_Tobacco.asp?sitearea=&level
   • The Oregon Research Institute’s website on tobacco cessation directed at smokeless tobacco users is www.chewfree.com/

References


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