Parental Smoking and Childhood Ear Infections: A Dangerous Combination

Ear infections are very common in children; these infections are often called middle ear disease and include:

• Acute otitis media: Children with acute otitis media have signs and symptoms of infection, such as ear pain and fever. Acute otitis media is very common in children; more than 5 million cases occur each year in the United States.

• Otitis media with effusion: Children with otitis media with effusion have extra fluid in the middle ear, so symptoms may include feeling like the ear is plugged or difficulty hearing. Children often get otitis media with effusion after having a cold or viral infection. About 90% of children have otitis media with effusion before starting school, most often between ages 6 months and 4 years.

Even though these infections are common, they can have serious consequences. Children who have repeated ear infections sometimes need surgery, which has risks. Children who have middle ear effusions are at risk for hearing loss, which can delay speech development.

Many parents are interested in ways to prevent ear infections in their children. A recent review in the *Archives* evaluated a large number of research studies. The major finding was that having any family member who smoked raised the risk of ear infections for their children. The review study calculated that every year 292 950 frequent ear infections, meaning having 3 or more ear infections in the past year, are directly caused by a child being exposed to tobacco smoke.

IF I SMOKE, HOW CAN I PREVENT EAR INFECTIONS IN MY CHILD?

Some parents try to cut down smoking and some try to smoke outside. These can be good steps on the path to quitting smoking, which is the best way to prevent ear infections in your child. Many parents who smoke are inspired to quit so that they can improve their children's health, as well as their own.

MY CHILD HAS ALREADY HAD SOME EAR INFECTIONS; IS IT TOO LATE FOR ME TO QUIT SMOKING?

Even if your child has had some ear infections, quitting smoking will still help to prevent future ear infections and their potential risks.

I'VE TRIED TO QUIT AND IT DIDN'T WORK; WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Many people are not able to quit smoking on the first try. There are many resources to help with the difficulties in quitting smoking; some of these include http://www.smokefree.gov/ and http://www.becomeanex.org/.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics
http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/earinfections.cfm

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