

## **SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE DURING PREGNANCY**

Adopted by Convention Delegates April 29, 1987

*Reviewed and deemed relevant April 2018*

- WHEREAS, The resolution *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome*, which addresses the hazards of fetal exposure to alcohol, was adopted by delegates to the 1986 National PTA Convention; and
- WHEREAS, Fetal exposure to legal and/or illegal substances other than alcohol may result in high risk of premature birth, low birth weight and other adverse effects ranging from mild symptoms of irritability to permanent and disabling damage; and
- WHEREAS, Use of substances during pregnancy is not limited to illegal drugs; certain over-the-counter medicines as well as some vitamins may pose a risk to the developing fetus; and
- WHEREAS, Early identification and education of pregnant women regarding use and/or abuse of substances can make a dramatic difference to the outcome of their pregnancies; and
- WHEREAS, Some health care professionals and some physicians may have insufficient training in identifying or in treating pregnant women who are using and/or abusing legal and/or illegal substances; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA and its constituent bodies promote an educational awareness program through meetings, bulletins and workshops to educate parents, students and communities about the dangers of the use and/or abuse of all substances (including those which have been prescribed by a physician) during pregnancy; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA and its constituent bodies support federal and state legislation, and county and city ordinances which would require establishments selling over-the-counter medicines and vitamins to post signs advising pregnant women to consult their physicians before taking any over-the-counter substance; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** That the National PTA urge the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to ensure rapid dissemination both to medical schools and to practicing physicians of the latest available information about both legal and illegal substance use and abuse during pregnancy.

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## **BACKGROUND SUMMARY**

In October 1986 the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation stated that, “Babies born ‘hooked’ are the tragedy of this decade. Eighty percent of today’s babies have their first contact with some kind of drug while still in the womb.”

Further information from the Foundation reveals that virtually every substance\*, whether an illegal drug or a prescribed or over-the-counter medication, taken by a pregnant woman passes through the placental barrier and may affect the fetus. Although prenatal alcohol use remains the most dangerous neonatal danger in terms of magnitude, the ever-increasing number of babies born addicted to the drugs their mothers used during pregnancy is a growing problem.

A recent survey suggests that nine out of ten of the most commonly reported fetal drug exposures involve over-the-counter medications or illegal drugs. Almost 1% of babies born in New York City are born addicted to drugs. A recent study of Los Angeles hospitals shows that as many as 20% of admissions to neonatal intensive care units are associated with prenatal drug use.

The Foundation finds that hospitals are now reporting an increase in the number of babies born addicted to cocaine. A Los Angeles intensive care nursery reports a ten-fold increase in cocaine-addicted infants in the past year. Another study shows that infants born to cocaine-addicted mothers suffer a markedly increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Infants addicted to PCP and heroin are born irritable, restless and emotionally distant as they suffer through withdrawal during the first weeks of life. Some of them may experience lifelong learning and emotional problems. Babies exposed to various “recreational” or illegal drugs while still in the womb are at high risk of being born prematurely and/or at lower-than-normal birth weights; the incidence of cerebral palsy and mental retardation increases under these circumstances.

The March of Dimes states that the tragedy of birth defects caused by prenatal substance use/abuse is that **such defects are preventable. It is recommended that no drug (prescribed, over-the-counter, vitamin, etc.) be taken by a pregnant woman unless it is recommended by a doctor who knows she is pregnant.**

\* Substance: alcohol; legal drugs, whether prescribed by a physician or over-the-counter; illegal/“recreational” drugs.