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Gov. Holcomb directs actions aimed at reducing Indiana's smoking rate

*ISDH, FSSA take immediate steps to make available tobacco cessation tools;
changes will enhance state's infant and maternal mortality efforts*

INDIANAPOLIS—The Indiana State Department of Health and Indiana Family and Social Services Administration today acted on direction from Governor Eric J. Holcomb to improve access to and affordability of tobacco cessation products for Hoosiers wanting to quit smoking or using tobacco.

This morning at Eskenazi Health Center West 38th Street, State Health Commissioner Kris Box, M.D., FACOG, issued a standing order effective Aug. 1 allowing Hoosiers to purchase tobacco cessation products at Indiana pharmacies without having to obtain an individual prescription. Indiana becomes only the 12th state with a policy or standing order allowing pharmacists to prescribe tobacco cessation products, eliminating financial and time barriers for individuals considering quitting smoking.

Dr. Jennifer Walthall, MD MPH, Secretary of Indiana Family and Social Services Administration also announced Indiana Medicaid will follow Gov. Holcomb's directive to reimburse health care providers offering tobacco cessation counseling for expectant mothers. She also announced that Indiana Medicaid will remove copayments for tobacco cessation products for pregnant women or members up to one year postpartum.

"One of our main priorities is reducing the smoking rate of our expectant moms, and we know they will respond positively," said Dr. Box. "Studies show that women are more likely to quit smoking during pregnancy because they want to give their baby the best possible start in life. Quitting tobacco will improve maternal health and send us farther down the path to achieving Governor Holcomb's goal of being best in the Midwest in infant mortality by 2024."

Women who smoke are at least twice as likely to have a preterm birth, which is the leading cause of infant mortality in Indiana. Indiana has the 7th highest infant mortality rate in the nation and is 3rd in the U.S. for maternal mortality. Gov. Holcomb has made reducing Indiana's infant and maternal mortality a top health priority of the state, and smoking is one of the most important modifiable causes of poor pregnancy outcomes. Studies show that smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of stillbirth by almost 50 percent and neonatal death by over 20 percent.

"According to statistics tracked by ISDH, nearly 25 percent of expectant Indiana mothers on Medicaid smoke during pregnancy compared to approximately 8 percent of all expectant mothers nationwide," Dr. Walthall said. "Increasing access to smoking cessation products and further reducing barriers to success will help improve both maternal and infant health."

Training will continue for health care professionals, such as medical assistants and community health workers, to connect them with pregnant women seeking tobacco cessation counseling.

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