

Media release  
Public Health Association  
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## **Māori women continue to smoke during pregnancy**

The rates of Māori women smoking during pregnancy must come down. That's the message from Irene Walker, Auahi Kore Manager for Te Hotu Manawa Māori, who spoke at the Public Health Association's annual conference in Waitangi today.

"Māori women continue to smoke more than anyone else in the country," Irene said.

"Even though rates are declining, 50 percent of Māori women still smoke. What's more alarming is that around 80 percent of this group continue to smoke during pregnancy.

"Even when pregnant Māori women quit smoking while they are carrying, their whanau may continue to smoke exposing unborn children and their mothers to the dangers of second hand smoke.

"Given all of these factors it's hardly surprising then that Māori have the second highest rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in the world."

Smoking during pregnancy also accounts for higher rates of asthma, burns and fire deaths, childhood cancer, pneumonia, and developmental delay.

Te Hotu Manawa Māori has invested in television advertising to reach Māori with this important message. Irene says that the reach of these communications needs to be extended, and that other solutions can be found in more traditional Māori practices.

"One of the things we are doing is revitalising traditional Māori birthing. This ritual is preceded by months of support for the mother, and this is the time when we can deal with issues like smoking.

"The ritual itself is far less traumatic for mother and child and involves whanau members. This means that we are placing the interests of the child at the centre of the extended family from the point of birth."

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