

The Dangers of Secondhand Smoke

Surgeon General's Warning on Secondhand Smoke

The Surgeon General released evidence in July 2006 supporting the fact that secondhand smoke - smoke from a burning cigarette and the smoke exhaled by the smoker- represents a dangerous health hazard.

The report stated that there is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure. Although secondhand smoke is dangerous to everyone, fetuses, infants, and children are at most risk. Even brief exposures can be harmful to children. This is because secondhand smoke can damage developing organs, such as the lungs and brain.

Infants and Children Effects and Exposure

Babies of mothers who smoked and those exposed to smoke are more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) than babies not exposed to smoke.

Babies of mothers who smoked and those exposed to smoke after birth have weaker lungs and thereby increased risk of more health problems.

Children with asthma exposed to secondhand smoke experience more frequent and severe attacks.

Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at increased risk for ear infections and are more likely to need an operation to insert ear tubes for drainage.

Youth and Teens Effects and Exposure

Secondhand smoke exposure causes respiratory symptoms, including cough, phlegm, wheezing, and breathlessness, among school-aged children.

On average, children are exposed to more secondhand smoke than nonsmoking adults.

Statistics

More than 4,000 different chemicals have been identified in secondhand smoke and at least 43 of these chemicals cause cancer.

Approximately 19 percent of adults in the United States currently smoke cigarettes, and about 40 percent of children are exposed to ETS at any given time.

About 3,000 people die each year in the U.S. from lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.

Checklist for Protection Against Secondhand Smoke:

Young children

- ✓ Remember that you are a powerful role model. If you don't smoke, your children are less likely to smoke.
- ✓ Make your home and car smoke-free spaces. Put up no-smoking stickers and signs in your home.
- ✓ Make sure you and your kids aren't exposed to second-hand smoke at daycare, school, or friends' homes.
- ✓ Support businesses and activities that are smoke-free. Let other businesses owners know that you can't support their businesses until they become 100 percent smoke-free too.
- ✓ If you can't find a smoke-free restaurant and must go to one that allows some smoking, ask to sit in the nonsmoking section.
- ✓ If your asthma or COPD is triggered by smoke, don't risk it—stay away from any place that allows smoking.
- ✓ Support laws that restrict smoking.

Youth and Teens

Parents—

- ✓ Talk to your children about smoking; they'll be less likely to smoke than if you ignore the problem.
- ✓ Support tobacco education in the schools and ban all smoking on school grounds, on school buses, and at school-sponsored events for students, school personnel, and visitors.
- ✓ Ask that schools enforce the policy and consistently administer penalties for violations, and that this is communicated in written and oral form to students, staff, and visitors.
- ✓ Vote for public smoking restrictions as an important component of the social environment that supports healthy behavior, reducing the number of opportunities to smoke, and making smoking less socially acceptable.
- ✓ Support tax increases on tobacco products so young people cannot afford them.

Teens—

- ✓ If your friends smoke, ask them in a caring way to quit or at least not to smoke around you.
- ✓ Peers, siblings, and friends are powerful influences on you and others. Understand that the most common situation for first trying a cigarette is with a friend who already smokes.

Families—

- ✓ Work together to uphold restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotions.