

Dangers of Secondhand Smoke



Even if you don't smoke, breathing in someone else's smoke can be deadly, too. Secondhand smoke causes about 3,000 deaths from lung cancer and tens of thousands of deaths from heart disease to nonsmoking adults in the United States each year.

Millions of children are breathing in secondhand smoke in their own homes. Secondhand smoke can be especially harmful to your children's health because their lungs still are developing. If you smoke around your children or they are exposed to secondhand smoke in other places, they may be in more danger than you realize.

Read more to learn about the dangers of secondhand smoke and how to create a smoke-free environment for your children.

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke (also known as environmental tobacco smoke) is the smoke a smoker breathes out and that comes from the tip of burning cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. It contains about 4,000 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are dangerous; more than 50 are known to cause cancer. Anytime children breathe in secondhand smoke they are exposed to these chemicals.

Smoking and your developing baby

If you smoke when you're pregnant, your baby is exposed to harmful chemicals, too. Smoking when you're pregnant may lead to many serious health problems for your baby, including

- Miscarriage
- Premature birth (born not fully developed)
- Lower birth weight than expected (possibly meaning a less healthy baby)
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Learning problems and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

The health risks go up the longer a pregnant woman smokes and the more she smokes. Quitting anytime during pregnancy helps—of course, the sooner the better. All pregnant women should stay away from secondhand smoke and ask smokers not to smoke around them.

Secondhand smoke and your children's health

Infants have a higher risk of SIDS if they are exposed to secondhand smoke. Children, especially those younger than 2 years, have a higher risk of serious health problems, or problems may become worse. Children who breathe secondhand smoke can have more

- Ear infections
- Upper respiratory infections
- Respiratory problems such as bronchitis and pneumonia
- Tooth decay

Children of smokers cough and wheeze more and have a harder time getting over colds. Secondhand smoke can cause other symptoms including stuffy nose, headache, sore throat, eye irritation, and hoarseness.

Children with asthma are especially sensitive to secondhand smoke. It may cause more asthma attacks and the attacks may be more severe, requiring trips to the hospital.

Long-term effects of secondhand smoke

Children who grow up with parents who smoke are themselves more likely to smoke. Children and teens who smoke are affected by the same health problems that affect adults. Secondhand smoke may cause problems for children later in life including

- Lung cancer
- Heart disease
- Cataracts (an eye disease)

Secondhand smoke is everywhere

Children can be exposed to secondhand smoke in many places. Even if there are no smokers in your home, your children can still be exposed to secondhand smoke. Places include

- In a car or on a bus
- At child care or school
- At a babysitter's house
- At a friend's or relative's house
- In a restaurant
- At the mall
- At sporting events or concerts

Creating a smoke-free environment

The following tips may help keep your children from being exposed to secondhand smoke:

- **Set the example.** If you smoke, quit today! If your children see you smoking, they may want to try it, and they may grow up smoking as well. If there are cigarettes at home, children are more likely to experiment with smoking—the first step in developing the habit.
- **Make your home and car smoke-free.** Until you can quit, don't smoke around your children or in your home and car.
- **Remove your children from places where there are smokers.** Sit in nonsmoking sections in public places. Eat at smoke-free restaurants.
- **Ask people not to smoke in your home.** Don't put out any ashtrays. Remember, air flows throughout a house, so smoking in even one room allows smoke to go everywhere.
- **Ask people not to smoke in your car.** Opening windows isn't enough to clear the air.
- **Choose a babysitter who doesn't smoke.** If your babysitter does smoke, ask her not to smoke when she's caring for your children. Consider changing babysitters to find a smoke-free environment for your children.

- **Encourage smoke-free child care and schools.** Help your children's child care or school, including outdoor areas and teachers' lounges, become smoke-free. Get your children involved in the effort to make schools smoke-free!

An important choice

If you smoke, one of the most important things you can do for your own health and the health of your children is to stop smoking. Quitting is the best way to prevent your children from being exposed to secondhand smoke.

It may be hard to quit. Talk with your doctor if you need help. There are many over-the-counter and prescription medicines that may help you quit. Also, you may find it helpful to join a stop-smoking class. Contact the American Lung Association, American Heart Association, or American Cancer Society for more information about support groups where you live.

Parents need to make every effort to keep their children away from smokers and secondhand smoke. Parents who smoke should quit for their health and the health of their children.

Resources

For more information about tobacco use, read *Smoking: Straight Talk for Teens* and *The Risks of Tobacco Use: A Message to Parents and Teens* from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Other sources include

American Cancer Society

800/ACS-2345 (800/227-2345)
www.cancer.org

American Heart Association

800/AHA-USA-1 (800/242-8721)
www.americanheart.org

American Lung Association

800/LUNG-USA (800/586-4872)
www.lungusa.org

American Legacy Foundation (Great Start Program [quitting during pregnancy])

866/66-START (866/667-8278)
www.americanlegacy.org/greatstart

US Environmental Protection Agency (Smoke-Free Homes)

866/SMOKE-FREE (866/766-5337)
www.epa.gov/smokefree

Fire safety

Children can be burned or start fires when they play with lit cigarettes, lighters, or matches. Many of these fires are caused by children younger than 5 years. Cigarette lighters are especially dangerous. Although butane cigarette lighters have to be made child-resistant, they are *not* childproof.

Keep your children safe from injury by following these guidelines:

- Never allow anyone to smoke while holding a child.
- Never leave a lit cigarette, cigar, or pipe inside or outside.
- Keep matches and lighters out of your children's reach.
- Remember that child-resistant doesn't mean childproof.

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this brochure. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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