

Secondhand Smoke Fact Sheet

“The debate is over. The science is clear. Secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults.”

- U.S. Surgeon General, June 27, 2006

Negative health and economic consequences that result from commercial tobacco use are not limited to those who make the conscious decision to continue smoking. **Infants, children, and adult non-smokers are put at risk** when they are exposed to secondhand smoke in the home, in vehicles, at work, and in public places. According to the latest U.S. Surgeon General Report, **there is no safe level of exposure.**¹ Even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can result in immediate harm.

What is Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke includes mainstream smoke (exhaled from the smoker) and side stream smoke (emitted from the burning end of a tobacco product). Secondhand smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals.² At least 50 of these chemicals are known to cause cancer.² Other studies have demonstrated that rooms contaminated by cigarette smoke can have pollution levels six times higher than a busy highway and that nicotine, the addictive chemical found in tobacco, can take as long as two weeks to clear once smoking has occurred.³

Health Risks to Adults

Health risks from secondhand smoke exposure vary by age. Among adults, secondhand smoke wreaks havoc on the cardiovascular system (the heart and blood vessels). Each year between 22,000 to 69,000 coronary heart disease deaths are attributed to secondhand smoke⁴, and non-smokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke in the home or work have a 25 to 30 percent increased risk for developing heart disease.¹ The second greatest risk linked to secondhand smoke is lung cancer, of which 3,000 non-smokers die each year.¹ Non-smokers who are exposed to smoke at home or in the workplace have a 20 to 30 percent increased risk for developing lung cancer.¹

Health Risks to Children

Children are placed at risk when they involuntarily breathe the smoke of others. Children are extremely vulnerable to secondhand smoke because their lungs and other organs are still developing. Secondhand smoke is responsible for 8,000 to 26,000 new cases of asthma, and 150,000 to 300,000 new cases of bronchitis and pneumonia in children annually.³ In addition, children who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely to experience ear infections, decreased lung function, decreased cognitive function, and more frequent trips to the hospital.³

Health Risks to Pregnancy and Infants

There is a direct relationship between pregnant mother's smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke with poor pregnancy outcomes. Low infant birth weight, gestational brain damage, abnormal blood pressure, cleft palates and lips, preterm labor, ectopic pregnancies are just a few pregnancy complications cited in the literature.⁵ Among infants secondhand smoke exposure increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)¹, the leading cause of infant mortality.



Steps to Protect Your Children From Secondhand Smoke

- **Stop Smoking!** This is the best way to eliminate the problem. Just remember that more than half of all adult smokers have quit smoking. You can too! Contact your state quitline for assistance **1 800 Quit Now**.
- If you must smoke, choose to **smoke outside**.
- **Don't allow smoking in your home or car** even when your children are not present. Remember the harmful chemicals in cigarettes and cigars can linger a lot longer than you think.
- **Do not smoke while you are pregnant** or allow yourself to be exposed to the secondhand smoke of others. Smoking and secondhand smoke exposure while pregnant can lead to a number of complications such as low infant birth weight, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and problems with your baby's respiratory health.
- Be certain your child's school or childcare facilities are 100% smoke-free.
- Do not allow people to smoke around your child. This includes babysitters, relatives, and friends. **Put up no smoking signs** to help enforce your smoke-free home and car rule.
- **Talk to your child** about the dangers of cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco.
- **Take the Smoke Free Homes Pledge today.** By taking the pledge you join forces with thousands of other tribal members in the Northern Plains who have already taken the pledge. Call the Northern Plains Tobacco Prevention Project for your promotional packet today **1 866 203 1039**.

Don't Be Fooled: The Following Methods Will Not Reduce the Risk of Harm to Your Loved Ones

Its Not Enough to:

- Move to another room
- Turn on a fan
- Open a window
- Blow smoke away from non-smokers
- Use fresheners and candles

Air Purification & Ventilation Systems are Not Enough

Air purification systems and ventilation systems, no matter how costly, will not reduce the many health risks associated with secondhand smoke.

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006.
2. National Toxicology Program. *10th Report on Carcinogens*, 2002. Research Triangle Park, NC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Sciences, Public Health Service, National Toxicology Program.
3. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Respiratory Health Effects of Passive Smoking: Lung Cancer and Other Disorders*. Washington, D.C.: Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development, Office of Health and Environmental Assessment, 1992. Publication No. EPA/600/6-90/006F.
4. California Environmental Protection Agency. *Proposed Identification of Environmental Tobacco Smoke as a Toxic Air Contaminant*. Sacramento, California: California Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, 2005.
5. Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. Harm caused by pregnant women smoking or being exposed to secondhand smoke. Washington, DC, 2004.