

## Secondhand smoke and your child

Cigarette smokers frequently complain that they feel like second-class citizens because smoking is prohibited in an increasing number of public and government buildings, not to mention rental cars, restaurants and hotel rooms.

“Why are we being punished when we’re only hurting ourselves?” some ask. Because that’s not a fact – others are being harmed by secondhand smoke, the smoke expelled by smokers and the smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar or pipe. Secondhand smoke is dangerous to innocent bystanders – especially children. In fact, it can be more dangerous to non-smokers than to the smokers themselves!

Consider these facts:

- ◆ Secondhand smoke contains more than 250 chemicals known to be toxic or cancer causing, according to the U.S. Surgeon General.
- ◆ Some of these substances are in stronger concentrations in secondhand smoke than in the smoke that goes directly into smokers’ lungs, according to Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada.
- ◆ The Surgeon General has concluded that there is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure. Even brief exposures can be harmful.
- ◆ Secondhand smoke causes about 3,000 deaths each year from lung cancer in people who don’t smoke, according to the American Lung Association (ALA).

Children face a higher risk of impact from secondhand smoke because their bodies are not fully developed and they breathe more rapidly than adults. Adults take between 14

and 18 breaths a minute, while babies can breathe up to 60 times a minute. Children 5 and younger take between 20 and 60 breaths per minute.

When the air is tainted with cigarette smoke, young, developing lungs receive a higher concentration of inhaled toxins than do older lungs. Children who spend one hour in an extremely smoky room inhale enough toxic chemicals to equal smoking 10 cigarettes.



Young children are especially vulnerable to secondhand smoke because they are less able to complain, because their complaints might be ignored or their tears believed to be prompted by another issue, such as hunger or wet diaper.

Small children exposed to secondhand smoke from birth are accustomed to the smoke and accept it as normal. Even if they don’t like the smell of smoke, they’re too young to leave the room or building on their own. Children look to the adults in their lives to provide them with a safe environment with fresh air.

The health risks to children who breathe secondhand smoke can be long-term. Children are more likely to suffer from pneumonia, bronchitis and other lung diseases, have more inner ear infections (and are more likely to need ear tubes for drainage) and develop asthma. Asthmatic children are likely to have more frequent asthma attacks.

An estimated 150,000 to 300,000 cases of infections, such as bronchitis and pneumonia, are diagnosed each year in children 18 months or younger who breathe secondhand smoke.

Those infections result in 7,500 to 15,000 hospitalizations, the ALA reports.

Secondhand smoke also has been associated with

- ◆ Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- ◆ tonsillitis
- ◆ meningococcal infections
- ◆ cancers and leukemias in childhood
- ◆ slower growth
- ◆ adverse neurobehavioral effects
- ◆ colds and sore throats
- ◆ high cholesterol levels and initiation of heart disease

### Smoke hard on moms, too

Secondhand smoke isn't just an issue after birth; babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy have significant elevated medical risks, according to a report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Babies whose mothers smoke while pregnant are more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) than babies who are not exposed to cigarette smoke.

Mothers who are exposed to secondhand smoke while pregnant are more likely to have lower birth weight babies, which makes babies weaker and increases the risk for many health problems.

Babies whose mothers smoke while pregnant have weaker lungs than other babies, which increases the risk for many health problems.