

Secondhand Smoke and Young Children

What is second hand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is a mixture of smoke from the burning of a cigarette, pipe or cigar and the smoke breathed out from the lungs of a smoker. It stays in the air for hours after smoking and is breathed in by nonsmokers. Toxins in the smoke can also collect on furniture, toys and clothing. Secondhand smoke can be harmful to young children who are exposed to environments where adults smoke.

Why are young children more vulnerable to secondhand smoke?

The effects of breathing second hand smoke are greater for young children since they breathe more air in relation to their body weight than adults. The irritants and toxins in second hand smoke can do more damage since children's lungs and immune systems are still developing. In addition, children depend on adults for care and supervision. They are not in control and not able to remove themselves from the environment of the smoker.

Why is second hand smoke unhealthy for young children?

- Children who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely to develop asthma and if they already have asthma they are more likely to experience more asthma attacks with more severe symptoms.
- Respiratory infections like pneumonia and bronchitis are more common in infants and young children who are exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Exposure to secondhand smoke increases the risk that a child will develop lung cancer in his lifetime.
- Ear infections occur more often and last longer in children exposed to secondhand smoke.

- The risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is higher in infants exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Babies who are born to mothers who smoke during pregnancy tend to weigh less and are more likely to be born early. After birth they may have weaker and smaller lungs.

Smoking and Child Care

California Child Care Licensing regulations state that smoking is prohibited on the premises of any child care center. In Family Child Care homes, smoking is prohibited during the hours of operation and in the areas of the home where children receive care. Some cities and counties have even stricter rules.

How to protect children from secondhand smoke

- If you smoke, don't smoke around children.
- Ask other people not to smoke around children.
- If smokers are smoking outside, make sure they are far enough away that children are not exposed.
- Do not allow smoking in cars used for transporting children.
- Help family and friends to quit smoking. Encourage smokers to seek help from a physician. There are many new products and programs that can help.
- Help enforce the no smoking regulations in schools and child care programs. Provide posters and written materials that are available through public health agencies. (See resources below.)

by **Bobbie Rose RN**

Resources and References:

CCHP No Smoking poster at www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/posters/others/no_smoking_0207.pdf.

Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov/smokefree/publications.html.

American Lung Association, Secondhand Smoke and Children Fact Sheet, www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=39857.

California OEHHA, Secondhand Smoke and Children's Health, 2006, www.oehha.ca.gov/air/environmental_tobacco/kidets041906.html.



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