

New York State Smokers' Quitline

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FACT SHEET:

THE TRUTH ABOUT SECONDHAND SMOKE



Secondhand smoke is a mixture of the smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, pipe or cigar, and the smoke exhaled from the lungs of smokers. It is also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). Exposure to ETS is called passive smoking or involuntary smoking.

What are the effects of secondhand smoke?

- ▶ Being around secondhand smoke causes irritation of the eyes, nose and throat.
- ▶ Secondhand smoke also irritates the lungs. This can lead to coughing, excess phlegm, chest discomfort, and difficulty breathing.
- ▶ Secondhand smoke has been classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a known cause of cancer in humans (Group A carcinogen).¹ There is no safe level of exposure to this class of carcinogens.
- ▶ Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. In 2001, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) reported finding 69 chemicals in cigarette smoke which are either known to or probably cause cancer.²
- ▶ An office worker subjected to eight hours of secondhand smoke inhales the equivalent of having smoked six cigarettes.³ Secondhand smoke levels in restaurants are approximately 160% - 200% higher than in office workplaces; levels in bars are 400% - 600% higher than in office workplaces.⁴
- ▶ ETS kills 53,000 non-smokers in the U.S. each year.⁵ Among these are about 3,000 from lung cancer and over 35,000 from heart disease.⁶

How does secondhand smoke affect children?

- ▶ Infants and young children whose parents smoke are among the most seriously affected by exposure to secondhand smoke. This puts them at higher risk of infections such as colds, pneumonia and bronchitis.
- ▶ Children exposed to secondhand smoke are also more likely to have reduced lung function and symptoms of respiratory irritation like coughing, excess phlegm, and wheezing.
- ▶ Secondhand smoke can lead to a buildup of fluid in the middle ear. This is a serious problem and in many cases results in the child needing an operation to get better.
- ▶ Children with asthma are especially at risk. The EPA estimates that between 200,000 and one million asthmatic children have their condition made worse by secondhand smoke.

- References on next page -

Sources:

1. Environmental Health Information Service, "9th Report on Carcinogens," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Toxicology Program, 2000
2. Health Effects of Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke: The Report of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph no. 10. Bethesda, MD. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, NIH Pub. No. 99-4645, 1999, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/nci_monographs/MONO10/MONO10.HTM.2
3. Project ASSIST: Smokefree Indiana, "Secondhand Smoke" Fact Sheet, 1997.
4. Siegel, M. "Involuntary smoking in the restaurant workplace: A review of employee exposure and health effects," Journal of the American Medical Association, 1993;270:490-493.
5. Project ASSIST: Smokefree Indiana, "Secondhand Smoke" Fact Sheet, 1997.
6. Health Effects of Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke: The Report of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph no. 10. Bethesda, MD. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, NIH Pub. No. 99-4645, 1999, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/nci_monographs/MONO10/MONO10.HTM.2

Additional Information From: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention