

Secondhand Smoke

Access to quality healthcare for children is forwarded by the availability of good healthcare information. With this year's release of a new surgeon general's report on secondhand smoke, the following information should be shared with patients.

NEW WARNING ON SECONDHAND SMOKE

In July 2006, the Surgeon General released evidence supporting the fact that secondhand smoke, smoke from a burning cigarette and the smoke exhaled by the smoker, represents a dangerous health hazard.

The new report states that there is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure. Although secondhand smoke is dangerous to everyone, fetuses, infants, and children are at most risk. Even brief exposures can be harmful to children. This is because secondhand smoke can damage developing organs, such as the lungs and brain.

INFANTS AND CHILDREN EFFECTS AND EXPOSURE

Babies of mothers who smoked and those exposed to smoke are more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) than babies who are not exposed to smoke.

Babies of mothers who smoked and those exposed to smoke after birth have weaker lungs and thereby increased risk of more health problems.

Children with asthma exposed to secondhand smoke experience more frequent and severe attacks.

Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at increased risk for ear infections and are more likely to need an operation to insert ear tubes for drainage.

YOUTH AND TEENS EFFECTS AND EXPOSURE

Secondhand smoke exposure causes respiratory symptoms, including cough, phlegm, wheeze, and breathlessness, among school-aged children.

On average, children are exposed to more secondhand smoke than nonsmoking adults.

STATISTICS

More than 4,000 different chemicals have been identified in secondhand smoke and at least 43 of these chemicals cause cancer.

On average, children are exposed to more secondhand smoke than nonsmoking adults.

Approximately 26 percent of adults in the United States currently smoke cigarettes, and 50 to 67 percent of children less than five years of age live in homes with at least one adult smoker.

28 percent of high schoolers are exposed to secondhand smoke in their own homes.

A recent study found that 34 percent of teens begin smoking as a result of tobacco company promotional activities.

Among middle school students who were current smokers, 71 percent reported never being asked to show proof of age when buying cigarettes in a store, and 66 percent were not refused purchase because of their age.

CHECKLIST FOR PROTECTION AGAINST SECONDHAND SMOKE:

Young children

Remember that you are a powerful role model. If you don't smoke, your children are less likely to smoke.

Make your home and car smoke-free spaces. Put up no-smoking stickers and signs in your home.

Make sure you and your kids aren't exposed to second-hand smoke at daycare, school, or friends' homes.

Support businesses and activities that are smoke-free. Let other businesses owners know that you can't support their businesses until they become 100 percent smoke-free too.

If you can't find a smoke-free restaurant and must go to one that allows some smoking, ask to sit in the nonsmoking section.

If your asthma or COPD is triggered by smoke, don't risk it; stay away from any place that allows smoking.

Support laws that restrict smoking.

YOUTH AND TEENS

Parents

Talk to your children about smoking; they'll be less likely to smoke than if you ignore the problem.

Support tobacco education in the schools and ban all smoking on school grounds, on school buses, and at school-sponsored events for students, school personnel, and visitors.

Ask that schools enforce the policy and consistently administer penalties for violations and that this is communicated in written and oral form to students, staff, and visitors.

Vote for public smoking restrictions as an important component of the social environment that supports healthy behavior, reducing the number of opportunities to smoke, and making smoking less socially acceptable.

Support tax increases on tobacco products so young people cannot afford them.

Teens

If your friends smoke, ask them in a caring way to quit or at least not to smoke around you.

Peers, siblings, and friends are powerful influences on you and others. Understand that the most common situation for first trying a cigarette is with a friend who already smokes.

Families

Work together to uphold restrictions on tobacco advertising and promotions.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: Children are Hurt by Secondhand Smoke. A Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006; Available at: www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/secondhandsmoke/factsheets/factsheet2.html.

CDC. Tobacco Use, Access & Exposure to Tobacco Among Middle & High School Students, US 2004 MMWR. Vol. 54(12) April 2005.

American Legacy Foundation. 2004 National Youth Tobacco Survey. 2005

CDC. Cigarette Use Among High School Students, United States, 1991-2003. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2004; 53(23): 499-502.

King C, Siegel M. The Master Settlement Agreement with the Tobacco Industry and Cigarette Advertising in Magazines. New England Journal of Medicine 2001; 345: 504-511.