

# Secondhand Smoke: Inside and Out

Below are conclusions and supporting evidence from the 2006 Surgeon General's report *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*. The Report was written by 22 national experts. Chapters were reviewed by 40 peer reviewers, and the entire Report was reviewed by 30 independent scientists and lead scientists within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## 1. There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.

- Secondhand smoke contains many chemicals that can quickly irritate and damage the lining of the airways. Even brief exposure can result in upper airway changes in healthy persons and can lead to more asthma attacks in children who already have asthma.
- Short exposures to secondhand smoke can cause blood platelets to become stickier, damage the lining of blood vessels, and reduce heart rate consistency, increasing the risk of a heart attack.

## 2. Secondhand smoke causes disease and premature death.

- Secondhand smoke contains hundreds of chemicals known to be cancer-causing or toxic, including formaldehyde, benzene, vinyl chloride, arsenic, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide.
- Secondhand smoke has been designated as a *known human carcinogen* (cancer-causing agent) by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Toxicology Program, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

## 3. Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at higher risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), respiratory infections, ear problems, and more severe asthma.

- Children exposed to secondhand smoke inhale many of the same cancer-causing substances and poisons as smokers. Because their bodies are developing, infants and young children are especially vulnerable to the poisons in secondhand smoke.
- Secondhand smoke causes bronchitis and pneumonia, and increases the risk of ear infections.
- Secondhand smoke exposure can cause children who already have asthma to experience more frequent and severe attacks.
- Babies exposed to secondhand smoke have weaker lungs and are more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) than babies who are not exposed to cigarette smoke.

## 4. Exposure to secondhand smoke has immediate effects on the cardiovascular system, causes heart disease, and causes lung cancer.

- Concentrations of cancer-causing and toxic chemicals are higher in secondhand smoke than in the smoke inhaled by smokers.
- Breathing secondhand smoke for even a short time interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of a heart attack.
- Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or at work increase their risk of developing heart disease by 25-30 percent and lung cancer by 20-30 percent.

## 5. Millions of children and adults are still exposed to secondhand smoke.

- Almost 60 percent of U.S. children aged 3-11 years are exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Levels of a chemical called cotinine, a biomarker of secondhand smoke exposure, fell by 70 percent from 1988-91 to 2001-02. In national surveys, however, 43 percent of U.S. nonsmokers still have detectable levels of cotinine.

For more information, contact Tobacco Free Lake County at 847-377-8090 or [TFLC@lakecountyil.gov](mailto:TFLC@lakecountyil.gov)

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