

Police: Facts about Second Hand Smoke

Due to number of questions the D.A.R.E. Officers receive from children regarding secondhand smoke, we have added this page along with several links so that both children and their parents can learn more about the effects of secondhand smoke.

What is Second-hand Smoke?

Tobacco smoke contains about 4,000 chemicals, including 200 known poisons. Every time someone smokes, poisons such as benzene, formaldehyde and carbon monoxide are released into the air, which means that not only is the smoker inhaling them but so is everyone else around him. Many studies now show that this secondhand smoke can have harmful effects on nonsmokers and even cause them to develop diseases such as lung cancer. Americans are beginning to recognize how hazardous smoking can be to everybody's health. National surveys show that most non-smokers and even the majority of smokers themselves believe that people should not smoke if they are around nonsmokers. Clearly, in our society, causing other people to be exposed to secondhand smoke is becoming less and less acceptable.

Side-stream Smoke

Every time anyone lights up a cigarette, cigar, or pipe, tobacco smoke enters the air from two sources. The first is mainstream smoke, which the smoker pulls through the mouthpiece when he inhales or puffs. Nonsmokers are also exposed to mainstream smoke after the smoker exhales it. The second, and even more dangerous source, is sidestream smoke, which goes directly into the air from the burning tobacco. Sidestream smoke-which a nonsmoker inhales whenever he's around someone who's smoking actually has higher concentrations of some harmful compounds than the mainstream smoke inhaled by the smoker. Studies show that there are several cancer-causing substances, as well as more tar and nicotine, in sidestream smoke as compared to mainstream smoke. In addition, carbon monoxide, which robs the blood of oxygen, can be two to fifteen times higher in sidestream smoke. Most of the smoke in a room results from sidestream smoke. When nonsmokers breathe in this type of smoke from other people's cigarettes, cigars, and pipes, it is often called involuntary or passive smoking.

Secondhand Smoke and Lung Cancer

The fact that cigarette smoking is the main cause of lung cancer in smokers is well-known. In 1986 the Surgeon General of the United States reported that involuntary smoking can cause lung cancer in healthy nonsmokers. Recent studies also indicate that secondhand smoke causes death from heart disease. What this could mean is that tobacco smoke and radiation may have this in common: there are just no safe levels of exposure.

Secondhand smoke has an especially bad effect on infants and children whose parents smoke. A number of studies show that in their first two years of life, babies of parents who smoke at home have a much higher rate of lung diseases such as bronchitis and pneumonia than babies with nonsmoking parents. A study involving children ages five-to-nine showed impaired lung function in youngsters who had smoking parents compared with those whose parents were nonsmokers. And smoking by pregnant women seems to predispose premature babies to respiratory distress syndrome. Parents who smoke at home can aggravate symptoms in some children with asthma and even trigger asthma episodes. Parents should only smoke outside the home or, better yet, quit smoking altogether. Even among children without asthma, a team of researchers found that acute respiratory illnesses happen twice as often to young children whose parents smoke around them as compared to those with nonsmoking parents. The American Lung Association is encouraging smoke-free families so that children can have the best possible chance to grow up healthy.

Smoke at the Workplace

The Surgeon General's report of 1986 established that the simple separation of smokers and nonsmokers within the same air space may reduce but not eliminate the risk of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. As a result, an increasing number of state and local laws now restrict smoking at the workplace. The idea behind these laws is that the preferences of both nonsmokers, and smokers should be considered, whenever possible. However, when these preferences conflict, the health and preferences of nonsmokers should come first. More and more private companies are also adopting policies that restrict smoking and protect nonsmokers at work.

Tobacco Odors

Burning tobacco smoke creates bad odors which also cling to people's clothes, hair, and even their skin. This contamination is so intense that when someone smokes in an air-conditioned room, the air-conditioning demands can jump as much as 600 percent in order to control the odors. The bad odors created by tobacco smoke also linger on. Long after a person has left a smoke-filled room, they may still have the odor of cigarettes on their bodies and in the fabric of their clothes. This is because while certain chemicals created by burning tobacco cause bad odors, other chemicals actually help the odors to hold onto the surface that they penetrate. Smokers themselves usually are not sensitive to these odors because of the destructive effects that the smoke from their own cigarettes has on the inner linings of the smoker's nose.

A Smoke-Free Society

More than 41 million Americans have kicked the cigarette habit. Millions more are trying. Overall, less than one out of three people in this country still smokes. Clearly, people who don't smoke are the majority, and they are concerned about being able to breathe clean air, free from harmful and irritating tobacco smoke. Even most smokers agree that smoking is hazardous to the health of nonsmokers as well as to their own health. These are among the facts that have led the Surgeon General to propose that America become a Smoke-Free Society by the year 2000. If we were a smoke-free nation, we would be helping to protect everybody's health.

Clean Air For Everyone

Being able to breathe clean air, free from harmful, irritating tobacco smoke is a serious issue for everyone. At home, at work, and in other public and private places it is important to speak up about how dangerous smoking can be to smokers and nonsmokers alike. Here's what you can do to help:

Let family, friends, co-workers, and others know that you mind if they smoke. Put stickers, buttons, and signs in your home, car, and office. Ask to be seated in nonsmoking sections when you travel or dine. Support legislation to restrict smoking or to set up smoke-free areas in public places and at the workplace. Ask your doctor and dentist to restrict smoking in their waiting rooms and to help establish no-smoking regulations in all health-care facilities, including hospitals. Propose no-smoking resolutions at organization

meetings. Encourage hotels and restaurants to establish no-smoking areas. Encourage management and unions where you work to establish a policy to protect nonsmokers on the job. Help to promote the concept of smoke-free families in your community. Contact your nearest American Lung Association office. They have the facts about smoking, and a network for action.

A Challenge for the Future

A recent Gallup survey conducted for the American Lung Association revealed that the majority of both smokers and nonsmokers believe that smoking can damage the health of people who don't smoke. Translating this belief into social action is the challenge we all face in the 1990's. Your local American Lung Association can help: they have a wide variety of programs to help people quit smoking. They can also assist you in finding out about ways to protect nonsmokers at work.