

SECONDHAND SMOKE

What you need to know.



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WHAT IS SECONDHAND SMOKE (SHS)

Secondhand smoke (SHS), also called **environmental tobacco smoke** (or ETS, the term preferred by the tobacco industry), refers to both smoke from a cigarette (**sidestream smoke**) and smoke exhaled by a smoker (**mainstream smoke**). The process of breathing secondhand smoke is called passive smoking.

THE FACTS

- Secondhand smoke contains approximately 4,000 chemicals, 50 of which are *carcinogenic* (cancer-causing to humans). The US EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has declared SHS a Class A carcinogen—the most deadly kind, for which there is no safe level of exposure.
- Secondhand smoke causes the same diseases as smoking, including heart and lung disease and cancers of the lung, bladder, blood, kidney and nasal passages.
- While breathing secondhand smoke may cause only minor discomfort such as eye and throat irritation, headache, dizziness and nausea, frequent exposure can lead to loss of productivity and absenteeism in the workplace. Like all hazardous substances, risk increases with exposure over time.
- Secondhand smoke is known to cause Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and children exposed to SHS are more likely to have lung problems, ear infections and severe asthma.
- More than 1,000 non-smokers will die this year in Canada from tobacco use by others; over 300 will die from lung cancer and at least 700 from heart disease.

HOW DOES SECONDHAND SMOKE AFFECT HEALTH?

A person who breathes secondhand smoke is breathing the same chemicals as someone smoking. While short-term secondhand smoke exposure may cause relatively minor problems like eye and throat irritation, headaches, dizziness and sometimes nausea, long-term exposure can cause heart and lung disease that may lead to death. Children, pregnant women, older people, and people with pre-existing heart and lung disease are at especially high risk. There is no safe threshold for secondhand smoke exposure.



SECONDHAND SMOKE CAN HURT YOUR LUNGS

Many of the chemicals in secondhand smoke damage the lungs. They damage the airways and air sacs of the passive smoker in much the same way they do the smoker's. Once inhaled, smoke causes the release of many different chemicals in one's body, disrupting the mechanism in the lungs that would normally protect it from injury brought about by tobacco smoke. As a result, secondhand smokers experience nasal congestion, have inflamed airways and tend to cough a lot. Secondhand smoke is also known to damage the walls of the air sacs (alveoli), which eventually impairs the ability of the lungs to supply oxygen to the blood. Prolonged exposure to secondhand smoke can cause Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) that includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Breathing secondhand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer by 20 to 30%. It is especially harmful to adults who have existing heart and lung disease and to young children who, because they breathe faster than adults, are prone to inhale more smoke relative to their size.

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SECONDHAND SMOKE AFFECTS YOUR HEART

Even as brief as an eight to 20 minute exposure to secondhand smoke causes physical reactions that have been linked to heart attack and stroke. These reactions include:

- Increased heart rate
- Decreased oxygen supply to the heart
- Constriction of the blood vessels, which increases blood pressure and makes the heart work harder

Secondhand smoke increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. Scientific evidence has shown conclusively that secondhand smoke increases the risk of heart disease in non-smokers, and that even short-term exposure has a huge effect on the heart, particularly in people with pre-existing conditions. Breathing secondhand smoke causes platelets to stick together while damaging the lining of the blood vessels. These changes can lead to a fatal heart attack.

Many of the chemical compounds harmful to the heart are more concentrated in sidestream smoke than in mainstream. For example, carbon monoxide, which is known to aggravate chest pain (angina), is eight to 11 times more concentrated in sidestream smoke. Adults who breathe five hours of secondhand smoke daily have higher “bad” cholesterol that clogs arteries. Regular exposure to secondhand smoke at work causes a 91% increase in coronary heart disease.



SECONDHAND SMOKE AFFECTS BABIES & CHILDREN

According to the World Health Organization, almost half of the world’s children are exposed to tobacco smoke from the 1.2 billion adults who smoke. In Canada, secondhand smoke affects hundreds of thousands of children under the age of five. These children are more likely to have breathing problems and are at increased risk for bronchitis, pneumonia and ear infections. Long-term exposure may cause permanent change in the structure and function of the lungs. There is compelling evidence from the California EPA report that SHS is a risk factor for asthma and for increasing the severity of symptoms requiring more medication among children with established asthma.

Recent studies have linked exposure to secondhand smoke to some cancers in children. While current research is looking at the effects of SHS on learning ability and behaviour, it is too early to establish a connection between the two.

Other studies have shown that secondhand smoke can affect even unborn babies, which may result in abortion, premature birth or lower birth weight. Babies of mothers who smoke are very likely to suffer from frequent lung infection and middle ear infections, besides being prone to SIDS.

SECONDHAND SMOKE CAUSES CANCER

About 50 of the 4,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke are carcinogens—that is, they can cause cancer in humans. The more secondhand smoke a person breathes, the higher the risk.

Secondhand smoke causes lung cancer and has been linked to cancer of the blood (leukemia), breast, cervix, thyroid and lymph glands. More recent studies have also linked secondhand smoke to nasal sinus cancer.

SECONDHAND SMOKE AND THE HOME AND WORKPLACE



Canadians spend 90% of their time indoors, whether at home or in the office. Considering the proven health hazards posed by secondhand smoke, everyone should do their part in preventing it.

In the workplace, employees and employers should all work together to make the workplace smoke-free. The benefits of a smoke-free workplace should be promoted; if at all possible, a smoke-free policy for both management and staff should be implemented.

A smoke-free environment offers an employer several benefits, including:

- Reduced direct and indirect health care costs
- Reduced health, life and disability premiums

- Reduced maintenance costs (no more cigarette butts and discarded match sticks to collect)
- Reduced fire risks

While smoking in the workplace directly causes immeasurable loss and suffering in both the smoker and non-smoker, there are indirect costs related to secondhand smoke, including:

- Increased absenteeism
- Decreased productivity
- Higher insurance premiums
- Higher property maintenance costs

For the above reasons, many employers these days might be more inclined to consider non-smokers when hiring.

The truth is it is quite easy to protect one’s self and family from secondhand smoke. Here are some tips:

- Make your home and vehicle smoke-free
- Work with daycare and school officials to ensure the places in which your child spends the most time are smoke-free
- Press public officials for smoke-free legislation
- If you smoke, quit
- Help someone who smokes quit

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