

Second-Hand Smoke and Children

Second-hand smoke contains over 4,000 substances, 40 of which are known to cause cancer. Some of these are in stronger concentration in second-hand smoke than in the smoke directly inhaled from a cigarette.

Second-hand smoke has been shown to cause the following health problems in children who are exposed to it; lower respiratory tract infections, increased fluid in the middle ear, upper respiratory tract irritation, reduced lung function, increased severity, and frequency of asthma attacks and reduced oxygen flow to tissues.



Second-hand smoke contains:

- Benzo(a)pyrene, found in coal tar
- Formaldehyde, used to preserve dead animals
- Hydrogen Cyanide, used in rat poison
- Ammonia, used to clean floors and toilets

Second-hand smoke is associated with:

- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Acute middle ear infections
- Tonsillectomy
- Meningococcal infections
- Childhood cancers and leukemia
- Double the risk of cough, bronchitis, and pneumonia
- Slower growth
- Adverse neurobehavioural effects
- Unfavourable cholesterol level
- Initiation of atherosclerosis (heart disease)

Children are especially vulnerable to second-hand smoke because:

- They breathe more air relative to body weight than adults, thereby absorbing more toxins
- They may be unable to complain if they are too young or they may be ignored
- Their lungs and immune systems are not yet fully developed
- They are less able to remove themselves from exposure

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Expectant mothers who smoke or who expose themselves to second-hand smoke, pass second-hand smoke to the developing child in their womb. This may result in:

- Behavioural problems
- Complications during pregnancy
- Miscarriage
- Deficits in intellectual ability
- Low birth weight
- Stillbirth
- Reduced lung function in the baby



Tips to protect children from second-hand smoke:

- If you smoke, quit—it's never too late to quit
- Never smoke around pregnant women, infants, or children
- Do not permit smoke in your home or vehicle
- Ensure that your child's daycare and babysitter's homes are smoke-free
- Never leave a lit cigarette, lighter, or matches unattended
- Clear away ashtrays to prevent children from playing with cigarette butts
- Opening a window or running a fan will not rid the air of toxic cancer-causing chemicals
- Do not take children to public places or events where smoking is permitted
- Remember that children model what they see their parents doing—the best way to prevent your child from smoking is to not smoke yourself!

The Ontario Government has passed legislation making it illegal to smoke in a vehicle when a child under the age of 16 is present

Source: Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Lung Association, BC Health Files