

Passive (Involuntary) Smoking

Nonsmoking children who live in homes with smokers are involuntarily exposed to cigarette smoke. This situation is called "passive smoking."

The smoke comes from two sources: secondhand smoke and sidestream smoke. Secondhand smoke is the smoke exhaled by the smoker. Sidestream smoke is the smoke that rises off the end of a burning cigarette. Most of the smoke in a room is sidestream smoke. Sidestream smoke contains two or three times more harmful chemicals than secondhand smoke because it does not pass through the cigarette filter. At its worst, a child in a very smoky room for one hour with several smokers inhales as many bad chemicals as he would by actually smoking 10 or more cigarettes.

In general, children of smoking mothers absorb more smoke into their bodies than children of smoking fathers because they spend more time with their mothers. Children who are breast-fed by a smoking mother are at the greatest risk because chemicals from the smoke are in the breast milk as well as the surrounding air.

HARMFUL EFFECTS OF PASSIVE SMOKING ON CHILDREN

Children who live in a house where someone smokes have more respiratory infections. Their symptoms are also more severe and last longer than those of children who live in a smoke-free home.

The impact of passive smoke is worse during the first five years of life, when children spend most of their time with their parents. The more smokers there are in a household and the more they smoke, the more severe a child's symptoms are.

Passive smoking is especially hazardous to children who have asthma. Exposure to smoke causes more severe asthma attacks, more emergency room visits, and more admissions to the hospital. These children are also less likely to outgrow their asthma.

The following conditions are worsened by passive smoking:

- pneumonia
- coughs or bronchitis
- croup or laryngitis
- wheezing or bronchiolitis
- asthma attacks
- flu (influenza)
- ear infections
- middle ear fluid and blockage

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- colds or upper respiratory infections
- sinus infections
- sore throats
- eye irritation
- crib deaths (SIDS)
- school absenteeism caused by illness.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD FROM PASSIVE SMOKING

1. Give up smoking.

You can stop smoking if you get help. Sign up for a stop-smoking class or program. If you need some self-help reading materials, call your local American Lung Association or American Cancer Society office. If you want your child not to smoke, set a good example by not smoking yourself.

It is even more important to give up smoking if you are pregnant. The unborn baby of a smoking mother has twice the risk for prematurity and newborn complications. You must also avoid smoking if you are breast-feeding because harmful chemicals from the smoke get into the breast milk.

The Surgeon General of the United States would like our country to become a smoke-free society by the year 2000. For more information call the National Cancer Institute on their toll-free line: 1-800-4-CANCER.

2. Never smoke inside your home.

Some parents find it very difficult to give up smoking, but all parents can change their smoking habits. Smoke only when you are away from home. If you have to smoke when you are home, smoke only in your garage or on the porch.

If you have to smoke inside your house, decide which room in your home will be a smoking room. Keep the door to this room closed and open a window sometimes to let fresh air into the room. Wear an overshirt in this room so your underlying clothing does not collect the smoke. Never allow your child inside this room. Don't smoke in any other parts of the house. Visitors must also smoke only in this one room.

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3. Never smoke when you are close to your child.

If you cannot limit your smoking to one room, at least don't smoke when you are holding your child. Never smoke in a car when your child is a passenger. Never smoke when you are feeding or bathing your child. Never smoke in your child's bedroom. These precautions will reduce your child's exposure to smoke and protect him from cigarette burns. Even doing just this much will help your child to some degree.

4. Avoid leaving your child with someone who smokes.

Ask about smoking when you are looking for day care centers or baby sitters. If your child has asthma,