

Secondhand Smoke and Young Children

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is a mixture of smoke from the burning of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar and the smoke that is breathed out from the lungs of a smoker. Secondhand smoke can stay in the air for hours and is breathed in by nonsmokers. Secondhand smoke contains 50 known cancer causing agents, 250 poisons, and 4,000 chemicals. Toxins in the smoke can collect on furniture, toys, and clothing which is now being termed as third-hand smoke. Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to young children and children are most vulnerable around care takers who smoke indoors.

Why are young children more vulnerable to secondhand smoke?

The effects of breathing secondhand smoke are greater for young children since they breathe more air in relation to their body weight than adults. The toxins and irritants in secondhand smoke can do more damage to children's lungs and immune systems as they are still developing. Children also depend on adults for their care and supervision. They are not in control and not able to remove themselves from the environment of the smoker.

What are the health risks for young children?

- Children who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely to develop asthma and if they already have asthma they are more likely to experience more attacks with more severe symptoms
- Respiratory infections like pneumonia and bronchitis are more common in infants and young children who are exposed to secondhand smoke
- Exposure places children at higher risks of infections as a result of damage to their immune system
- Exposure to secondhand smoke puts a child at an increased risk of developing lung cancer and cardiovascular disease when they are older
- Ear infections occur more often and last longer for children exposed to secondhand smoke
- The risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is higher in infants exposed to secondhand smoke
- Secondhand smoke can affect a pregnant women's developing baby making them more likely to weigh less and to be born preterm.
- Secondhand smoke is linked to cognitive and behavioral effects and childhood cancers
- Secondhand smoke exposure in vehicles is especially dangerous due to the confine space.

How to protect children from secondhand smoke

- If you must smoke, please smoke outside and far enough away that children are not exposed. Wash your hands and change clothes to reduce third-hand smoke exposure.
- Have a No Smoking policy for your home and car.
- Help family and friends to quit smoking. Encourage them to seek help from a healthcare provider and the North Dakota Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-784-8669. The Quitline offers free counseling and nicotine replacement therapy products and has a solid track record in assisting tobacco users in quitting for good.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of quitting and offer social support to those wanting to quit.
- Help enforce the no smoking regulations in schools and childcare programs.



Richland County
Tobacco Prevention
Program
701-642-7744

