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Second-hand Smoke

Updated: May 2012

Original: December 2006

IT'S YOUR HEALTH

Second-hand Smoke

THE ISSUE

Each year in Canada, second-hand smoke causes the death of at least 800 non-smokers, due to lung cancer and heart disease. The best way to protect your family from the health effects of second-hand smoke is to make your home and car 100% smoke-free.



WHAT IS SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Second-hand smoke is the combination of smoke coming directly from a burning tobacco product and the smoke exhaled by a smoker. When you see second-hand smoke in the air, what may not be so obvious is that there are more than **4,000 chemicals in the smoke** and that at least 70 of these chemicals are carcinogens (chemicals that cause, initiate or promote **cancer**).

When someone smokes in your home, second-hand smoke spreads from one room to another, even if the door to the smoking area is closed. In addition, potentially toxic chemicals in second-hand smoke can cling to rugs, curtains, clothes, food and other materials, and can usually remain in a room or car long after someone has smoked there.

You may think you can clear the smoke from a room or your car by opening a window or turning on a fan, but this is not the case. Studies have shown there is no level of ventilation that will eliminate the harmful effects of second-hand smoke. Even air filters (air purifiers) are not enough. Second-hand smoke is composed of both particles and gases. Most air filters are designed to remove fine smoke particles from the air, but they do not remove the gases that can cause diseases.

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THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Second-hand smoke hurts everyone, but is particularly dangerous to babies and children because their lungs are still developing. Because their lungs are smaller, babies and children breathe more quickly and take in more harmful chemicals for their size than adults do. In addition, their immune systems are less developed and cannot protect them as much from tobacco smoke.



The health effects from exposure to second-hand smoke include the following:

For pregnant women

- Chemicals in second-hand smoke can affect fetal growth and may result in a [low birth weight baby](#).
- [Second-hand smoke exposure during pregnancy](#) can result in premature delivery.
- Second-hand smoke contains many toxic chemicals that can harm an unborn baby.

For infants and children

- Infants who breathe in second-hand smoke have a higher risk of dying from [sudden infant death syndrome \(SIDS\)](#) or crib death.
- Infants and children exposed to second-hand smoke have more frequent respiratory tract problems, such as coughs, [pneumonia](#), [bronchitis](#), [croup](#), and wheezing.

- [Children of parents who smoke](#) are at an increased risk of asthma.
- Second-hand smoke increases the number of [ear infections](#) in children.

For adults

Non-smoking adults exposed to second-hand smoke are at an increased risk for [lung cancer](#) and [respiratory problems](#). They are also at an increased risk for [heart disease](#) and stroke because second-hand smoke does the following:

- fosters the formation of blood clots that can lead to heart attacks and [stroke](#)
- raises the heart rate and damages heart muscle
- lowers the level of protective HDL-cholesterol in blood

REDUCE YOUR RISK

If you choose to smoke or if you live with a smoker, protect your family from the health effects of second-hand smoke by keeping your home and car 100% smoke-free. Start by getting a copy of [Make Your Home and Car Smoke-Free: A Guide to Protecting Your Family From Second-hand Smoke](#). The guide offers many helpful tips, including the following:

In your home

- Set up an area outside for smokers to use.
- Post a “smoke-free” magnet on your fridge to let people know that you do not allow smoking.
- Remove all ashtrays from inside your home.
- Ask your children’s caregivers not to smoke around your children.
- Ask anyone who is doing work in your home not to smoke indoors.

The Guide also suggests additional steps you can take if you live in a multi-unit building (apartment, etc.), such as using foam or insulation to fill, seal and insulate cracks and gaps around pipes and vents.



In your car

- Let all passengers know that your car is smoke-free.
- Clean out the ashtray and fill it with sugar-free candies or potpourri.
- Wash your car and give it a good cleaning, including a thorough vacuuming, if someone has smoked in it.
- Post a “smoke-free” decal in your car to let everyone know you do not allow smoking.
- Having the window open does not protect passengers for the over 70 cancer causing chemicals in tobacco smoke.

If you are a smoker, you may find it easier to quit once your home and car become smoke-free. See the [for more information](#) section below for resources that can [help you become a non-smoker](#).

THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

The primary mission of the [Federal Tobacco Control Strategy \(FTCS\)](#) is to reduce tobacco-related disease and death among Canadians. It recognizes that the key to success is comprehensive, integrated and sustained action, carried out in collaboration with all partners and directed at Canadians of all ages.

As part of this strategy, [Health Canada](#) designs and carries out public awareness campaigns on issues like the dangers of second-hand smoke.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Health Canada, *Go Smoke Free* at: www.gosmokefree.gc.ca/quit
- *Make Your Home and Car Smoke-Free: A Guide to Protecting Your Family from Second-hand Smoke* at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/tobac-tabac/second-guide/index-eng.php
- *On the Road to Quitting – Guide to Becoming a Non-Smoker* at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/tobac-tabac/orq-svr/index-eng.php

FOR INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONALS

- Health Canada *Tobacco Control Programme* at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/branch-dirgen/hecs-dgsesc/tcp-plct/index-eng.php
- *Federal Tobacco Control Strategy* at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/consult/_2011/foward-avenir/index-eng.php
- Public Health Agency of Canada, *Respiratory Disease in Canada* at: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/rdc-mrc01/index-eng.php

RELATED RESOURCES

- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the *Healthy Canadians* website at: www.healthycanadians.gc.ca
- For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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