



Secondhand Smoke

1. What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke (SHS) is a mixture of smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar or pipe and the smoke that a smoker breathes out. Non-smokers who are exposed to SHS will breathe in nicotine and other toxic chemicals just like smokers do. Being exposed to SHS for five minutes is like smoking one cigarette.

2. Why is secondhand smoke a danger?

Cigarette smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals, including over 50 that cause cancer, serious illness or death. There is no safe level of SHS. Breathing even a little SHS can be harmful in many ways.

Each year in the United States, SHS causes about:

- 46,000 deaths from heart disease in non-smokers who live with smokers
- 3,400 deaths from lung cancer in non-smoking adults
- 150,000 to 300,000 lung infections in children under 18
- 202,000 asthma episodes in children with asthma

3. What can happen if you breathe in secondhand smoke?

Within a few minutes, SHS can cause:

- Coughing, excessive phlegm and chest discomfort
- Burning eyes, nose and throat
- Headaches, dizziness
- Smelly rooms, clothes and hair

Breathing in SHS can also lead to:

- Cancer
- Heart disease and stroke
- Ear infection
- Asthma
- Bronchitis

4. Is secondhand smoke more harmful to children?

Yes. Children are more likely than adults to be hurt by SHS, since children and their lungs are still developing. Children who breathe SHS are more likely to have asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis, ear infections, and lung diseases. Babies are at risk from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

5. How can I protect myself and my children from secondhand smoke?

- Do not allow smoking inside your home or car
- Ask smokers to smoke outside, away from doors and windows
- Take your child to places where no smoking is allowed
- Help a family member stop smoking
- Call 1-800-NO-BUTTS (or 1-800-662-8887) for free counseling over the phone to help you or your loved ones stop smoking

Sources

1. *Secondhand Smoke*. American Lung Association. www.lungusa.org
2. *Secondhand Smoke*. National Cancer Institute. <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Tobacco/ETS>
3. *Secondhand Smoke*. American Cancer Society. <http://www.cancer.org/>

For additional resources, please dial 2-1-1 or visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.