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Parenting the Preschooler

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/pp/>

Secondhand Smoke

As a parent, you work hard to protect your child against diseases and other hazards that might harm them. Secondhand smoke is one such hazard.

What is Secondhand Smoke?

- Secondhand smoke is a term used for the combination of smoke that is breathed out by a smoker and smoke from the end of a burning cigarette, cigar, or pipe.
- Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals including benzene, carbon monoxides, ammonia, and cyanide—more than 40 of which are known to cause cancer and many of which are strong irritants.
- Secondhand smoke is also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS).
- Exposure to secondhand smoke is called involuntary smoking, or passive smoking.

Exposing a child to secondhand cigarette smoke all day is the same as the child smoking three cigarettes.

Secondhand Smoke is a Serious Health Risk to Children.

- Secondhand smoke affects the developing lungs of young children.
- Young children whose parents smoke are the most seriously affected by secondhand smoke, being at increased risk of lower tract respiratory infections such as pneumonia and

bronchitis. Secondhand smoke is responsible for between 150,000 and 300,000 lower respiratory tract infections in infants and children under 18 months of age annually, resulting in between 7,500 and 15,000 hospitalizations each year.

- Children exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to have reduced lung function and symptoms of respiratory irritation (cough, excess phlegm, and wheeze).
- Secondhand smoke can lead to buildup of fluid in the middle ear, the most common cause of hospitalization of children for an operation.
- Asthmatic children are especially at risk. Exposure to secondhand smoke increases the number of episodes and severity of symptoms. Secondhand smoke may also cause non-asthmatic children to develop the condition.
- Babies exposed to secondhand smoke are twice as likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Protecting Your Preschooler

- Avoid smoking in your home.
- Ask other people not to smoke in your home. Because smoke lingers in the air, people may be exposed even if they are not present while a person smokes. It may feel awkward and uncomfortable at first to tell people not to smoke in your home, but tell them that for the sake of your child's health, you cannot allow smoking in your home.

Try saying:

“The smoke is bad for my child’s health.”

“I don’t want my child exposed to smoke because it increases the chance of developing asthma and chronic ear infections.”

“We are concerned that if we smoke in front of the kids, they will think that it’s cool and do the same thing.”

- Ask smokers to go outside while they smoke, away from your child’s play area.
- If someone must smoke inside, limit smoking to a room where windows can be opened to send the smoke outside. Be sure the room used for smoking has a working smoke detector.
- Test your home for radon. Radon contamination in combination with smoking is a much greater health risk than either one individually.
- Don’t have your child ride in an automobile while a person smokes. The high concentration of smoke substantially increases exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Make sure your child’s school, child care programs, and transportation are smoke-free. Do not allow babysitters to smoke in the house or smoke around your children.

A Special Message For Smokers

If you continue to smoke, here are some things you can do to help protect your child and other family members:

- Don’t smoke around your children. Their lungs are very susceptible to smoke. If you are expecting a child, quit smoking.
- Keep your home smoke free. Nonsmokers can get lung cancer from exposure to your smoke.
- Don’t smoke in an automobile with the windows closed if passengers are present.
- If you want to quit smoking call the Wisconsin Quit Line 1-877-270-STOP (7867) toll free.

The quit line offers telephone counseling, free information, and referrals to local programs and cessation.



Benefits of a Smoke-Free Home

The greatest benefit, of course, is that you will remove all the health risks associated with secondhand tobacco smoke. Plus:

- Your home will smell much better.
- Your food will taste better.
- You’ll spend less time, energy, and money cleaning your curtains, walls, windows, and mirrors.
- Your insurance rates may be lower—check with your insurance company.
- Even your pets will be happier. For example, secondhand smoke increases the risk of lung cancer in dogs.

Sources:

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- "What You Can Do About Secondhand Smoke as Parents, Decision-Makers, and Building Occupants." (September 25, 2003). US Environmental Protection Agency.
- Quit Line. (March 5, 2004). UW Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention.

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