

WHAT ARE YOUR YOUNG CHILDREN BREATHING?

Secondhand smoke is the smoke given off by a cigarette, cigar or pipe combined with the smoke exhaled by a smoker. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that breathing other people's smoke can cause disease, disability and even death.

While exposure to secondhand smoke is unsafe for all of us, children under the age of five are especially vulnerable to its harmful affects. Because their lungs are not fully developed, young children are more susceptible to the toxins contained in secondhand smoke. Research indicates that young children who are exposed to secondhand smoke are at risk for:

- More frequent and longer lasting **middle ear infections**
- Increased **respiratory infections** including bronchitis and pneumonia
- Increased changes of **developing asthma**
- More frequent **asthma attacks**
- Increased chances of **developing allergies**
- Chronic **coughing and wheezing**
- **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)**
- **Nicotine poisoning** and other toxic exposure from swallowing cigarettes, cigarette butts and other tobacco products they find around the house.

Secondhand smoke causes up to 65,000 deaths in the US every year and is the third leading cause of lung cancer. For every eight smokers who die from tobacco-related disease, one nonsmoker also dies from exposure to secondhand smoke (*Center for Disease Control, 2004*). These figures do not include the thousands of youth and adults who become ill or hospitalized due to exposure to tobacco smoke.

Why is secondhand smoke so dangerous? Classified as a Group A carcinogen (cancer-causing substance) by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are considered dangerous toxins. Secondhand smoke is considered the nation's number one airborne carcinogen with no safe level of exposure (*EPA, 1992*). Air pollution from secondhand smoke is ten times greater than diesel car exhaust (*British Medical Journal, 2004*).

To learn more about secondhand smoke and what you can do to protect young children, visit Smoke Free Union at www.smokefreeunion.com or call 704-283-3539 for an informational packet.