

WHAT ARE YOUR SCHOOL AGE YOUTH 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.

Secondhand smoke is more dangerous than previously thought. It is responsible for up to 65,000 deaths each year in the U.S. For every eight smokers who die from tobacco-related disease, one nonsmoker also dies from exposure to secondhand smoke (*CDC, 2004*). These figures do not include the thousands of youth and adults who experience illness from exposure to tobacco smoke.

Why is secondhand smoke so dangerous? Classified as a Group A carcinogen or cancer causing substance by the Environmental Protection Agency, secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are considered dangerous toxins. It 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*).

Secondhand smoke affects all of us; however there are certain people who are especially vulnerable to its harmful effects, including pregnant women, infants and young children, school-age youth, anyone with asthma and other respiratory conditions, adults with heart disease and the elderly.

In North Carolina, as many as 48% of school-age youth are exposed to secondhand smoke on a regular basis. Youth who breathe in secondhand smoke are at risk for:

- Developing asthma and having more frequent asthma attacks
- Bronchitis and other lung infections
- Middle ear infections
- Chronic coughing and wheezing
- Tonsillitis
- More tooth decay and cavities
- Lower performance on reading, math and logic skills
- Becoming smokers themselves in the teen years

These conditions put your child at serious health risk, cause them to have more missed days of school than children who are not exposed to smoke, and impact your family's out of pocket health care costs.

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