



## Secondhand Smoke or Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS)

The National Hispanic Indoor Air Quality Helpline (1-800-SALUD-12) 1-800-725-8312

### What is secondhand smoke?



Secondhand Smoke, also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), is the smoke exhaled from the lungs of smokers and the smoke that comes from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar, or pipe. Exposure to secondhand smoke is called involuntary smoking or passive smoking. Secondhand smoke causes or worsens a wide range of health effects, including cancer, respiratory infections, and asthma in adults and children. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that secondhand smoke causes approximately 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 35,000 heart disease deaths in U.S. nonsmokers each year. Secondhand smoke is also responsible for 150,000 to 300,000 lower respiratory tract infections in infants.

### Why is secondhand smoke harmful?



Secondhand smoke is harmful to nonsmokers because it contains over 4,000 dangerous chemicals that when inhaled can cause a number of respiratory problems. Half of these chemicals are naturally found in tobacco. The other chemicals are produced when the tobacco is burned. About 200 of the chemicals found in secondhand smoke are poisons. About 43 chemicals are cancer causing substances. Some of the more dangerous chemicals found in secondhand smoke are: nicotine, carbon monoxide, acetone, ammonia, arsenic, benzene, cadmium, cyanide, formaldehyde, lead, mercury, nickel, phenol, and styrene. Many of these same chemicals are those inhaled by smokers. Together these chemicals form a sticky black residue known as tar that when inhaled can damage respiratory tissue.

### Does secondhand smoke cause lung cancer?



Exposure to secondhand smoke causes about 3,000 lung cancer deaths each year. Secondhand smoke is classified by the EPA as a Group A carcinogen, a classification reserved for substances shown to cause cancer in humans. Cancer is a term used to describe the unrestricted growth and division of cells in your body that result in the development of benign or malignant tumors. Benign tumors are not cancer and do not spread to other parts of the body. Malignant tumors are cancer. These tumors are cellular masses that divide rapidly and in ways that are not normal. Much of the concern over cancer is related to whether cancer cells in the tumor have traveled to other parts of the body.

### What other health effects does secondhand smoke cause?



Secondhand smoke causes a number of health effects that can lead to other serious pulmonary and coronary conditions in adults and children. Some of these health conditions are:



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- Eye, nose and throat irritation.
- Headaches.
- Dizziness or nausea.
- Increased risk of respiratory infections including colds, bronchitis, and pneumonia.
- Aggravated asthma symptoms.
- Cough, excess phlegm, and wheezing.
- Low birth weight in newborns.
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

### How does secondhand smoke affect children?



Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children whose lungs are still developing. Exposure to secondhand smoke can lead to decreased lung function in infants. According to the American Lung Association, children who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely to suffer from coughing, wheezing, and increased mucus. They are also more likely to suffer from bronchitis and pneumonia. Children who breathe secondhand smoke have more ear infections due to the build up of fluid in the middle ear. Children who are exposed to secondhand smoke are also more likely to develop asthma. Those with chronic asthma are more likely to have greater occurrences of asthma attacks. According to the National Cancer Institute, secondhand smoke is also linked to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

### What can I do to protect myself and my family from secondhand smoke?



- Do not smoke in your home or vehicle.
- Remove ashtrays and cigarette lighters from your home.
- Ask other people who smoke not to smoke in your home (including guests or baby-sitters).
- Make sure areas in which your child spends time are smoke free (including your child's day care or school).
- Socialize in smoke free environments (limit visits to family who have smoke filled homes, eat in smoke free restaurants, etc.).
- Seek a smoke-free workplace.
- Tenants affected by the secondhand smoke of neighbors can seek a smoke-free living environment through cooperative landlord/tenant arrangements.
- If someone in your home suffers from asthma, talk to your health provider about ways to manage asthma and how you can reduce indoor triggers.



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### Additional resources



The National Alliance for Hispanic Health  
Aire Limpio para su Familia Helpline (Bilingual Service Spanish / English)  
1-800-725-8312 or (800) SALUD-12.  
<http://www.hispanichealth.org>

Su Familia Helpline  
1-866-783-2645 or (866) SU-FAMILIA  
<http://www.hispanichealth.org>

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/etsfs.html>  
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/etsbro.html>  
<http://www.epa.gov/smokefree/index.html>

American Lung Association  
[http://www.lungusa.org/tobacco/secondhand\\_factsheet99.html](http://www.lungusa.org/tobacco/secondhand_factsheet99.html)

Center for Social Gerontology, Inc.  
Smoke Free Environmental Law Project  
[www.tcsg.org/sfelp/home.htm](http://www.tcsg.org/sfelp/home.htm)