How We Can Protect Our CHILDREN

from Secondhand Smoke

A Parent's Guide

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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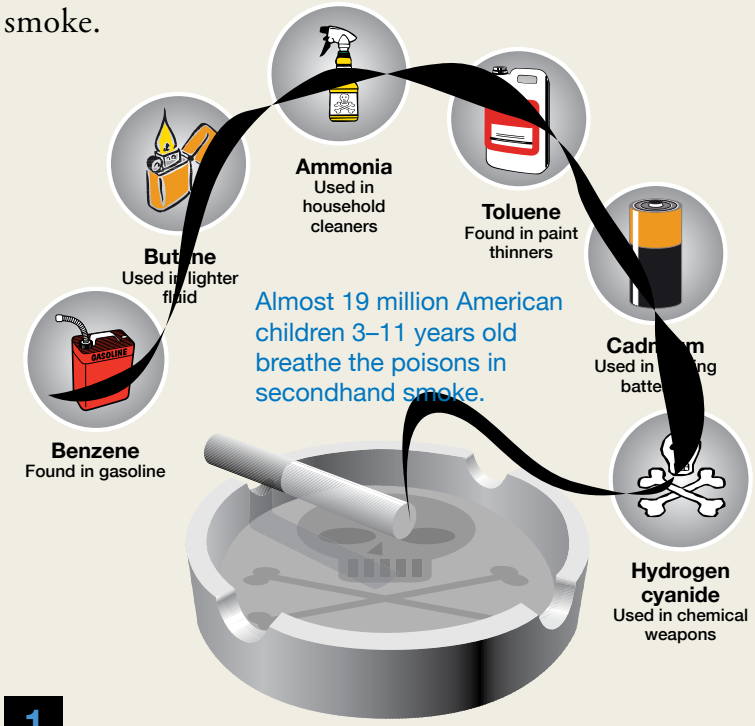
Secondhand smoke threatens our children.

Secondhand smoke comes from lit cigarettes and cigars. It also comes from smoke breathed out by smokers. When children breathe secondhand smoke, it is like they are smoking, too.

Secondhand smoke is made of thousands of chemicals. Many are poisons that stay in your body. What do these poisons do? The U.S. Surgeon General asked scientists to find out. They found that secondhand smoke harms everyone, especially children. They also learned that

- An estimated 88 million nonsmoking Americans, including 54% of children aged 3–11 years, are exposed to secondhand smoke.
- They breathe it at home, day care, and in cars.
- Children have more than twice the level of cotinine (an indicator of exposure to tobacco smoke) in their blood as nonsmoking adults.

Here are just a few of the chemicals and poisons in tobacco smoke.



Almost 19 million American children 3–11 years old breathe the poisons in secondhand smoke.

How does secondhand smoke hurt our children?

Tobacco smoke harms babies, even before they are born. It harms children, too, because their lungs and bodies are still growing.

- One in every five babies born to mothers who smoke has low birth weight. Low birth weight is a leading cause of infant death.
- Babies who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely to die unexpectedly from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), also called crib death.

Smoking during pregnancy can cause your baby to be born too early and have low birth weight. If you smoke, your baby is more likely to become sick or die.

- Babies and children who breathe secondhand smoke are sick more often with bronchitis, pneumonia, and ear infections.
- For children with asthma, breathing secondhand smoke can trigger an attack. The attack can be severe enough to send a child to the hospital. Sometimes an asthma attack is so severe that a child dies.

Children can't hide from secondhand smoke at home. Here's why...

Smoking in another room like a bathroom or bedroom pollutes **all** the air in your home. In an apartment, smoke in one room can go through the whole building.

- Smoking outside in a hall or stairwell does not protect children inside. Smoke goes under doors, windows, and through cracks.
- To protect the children inside, homes and apartment buildings must be smoke-free.

No amount of secondhand smoke is safe. Even when you can't smell it, cigarette smoke can still harm your child.

- Opening a window or using a fan does not protect children.
- Air purifiers and air fresheners do not remove smoke's poisons.
- Smoke from one cigarette can stay in a room for hours. Don't smoke at home, even when children aren't there.

Allowing people to smoke in only one room does not protect children. Smoke from halls and stairs gets inside, too.

We must protect children from secondhand smoke everywhere.

At Home. If you take care of children in your home, do not allow anyone to smoke inside. Do not let babysitters, family members, or friends smoke around your children.

In Day Care. Make sure smoking is not allowed in your child's day care.

At School. Make sure your child's school is smoke-free inside and out. All school events should be "No Smoking."

In Public. Choose restaurants and businesses that are smoke-free. "No Smoking" sections in restaurants do not protect children from secondhand smoke.

In Your Car. Do not allow anyone to smoke if children are riding in your car. Rolling down a window does not protect them.

Show that you care. Don't allow anyone to smoke around children.

Take simple steps to protect your children from secondhand smoke.

Children respect and learn from your actions and words. As caregivers, we teach our children by the choices we make.

- Ask people not to smoke around your children.
- Support family and friends who also want to stop smoking.
- Decide to have a smoke-free home and car, and ask family and friends to respect your decision.
- Get rid of all ashtrays in your home.
- Teach your children to stay away from secondhand smoke. Encourage your teens not to smoke.
- Make the decision to quit smoking. Get help from your doctor, family, and friends. Call this free quitline: 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).

As adults, we have the power to protect our children from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

What happens now can change our children's future.

To order copies of this brochure, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention **1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).**

For more information on protecting children from secondhand smoke, please visit **www.cdc.gov/tobacco**

For free information on how to quit smoking, call **1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)** or visit **www.smokefree.gov**

This brochure is based on *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General* and its summary, *Secondhand Smoke: What It Means to You*.

To download these publications, go to www.cdc.gov/tobacco and click on "Surgeon General's Report" or call toll-free **1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)** to order free copies.

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CHILDREN

Are your children in danger from secondhand smoke?

YES	NO	
☐	☐	Does anyone smoke near your children?
☐	☐	Do you allow people to smoke anywhere in your home?
☐	☐	Do you live in a building where neighbors smoke?
☐	☐	Do you allow smoking in your car?
☐	☐	Do your children visit places where people are smoking?
☐	☐	Is smoking allowed outside your day care, school, or church?

If you checked "Yes" to any of the above, your children are not safe from tobacco smoke.

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