

# **Second-hand Smoke and Children**

by Jessica Pangle

Secondhand smoke is defined as the combination of smoke from the end of a lit cigarette or cigar with the smoke exhaled by smokers themselves. According to the American Lung Association, There are over 250 toxic or cancer-causing chemicals present in secondhand smoke, including formaldehyde, benzene, vinyl chloride, arsenic, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide. According to the American Lung Association (ALA), the lungs of young children are still in the developmental process, making them more susceptible to secondhand smoke than adults. Children who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to develop respiratory problems in the future (i.e., asthma), as well as respiratory tract infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia. Secondhand smoke can also cause a buildup of fluid in the middle ear, which is the most common cause of childhood hearing loss. Studies have shown that for American children between the ages of 3-11, almost 60% (22 million) are exposed to secondhand smoke. A California study showed that 430 SIDS deaths in the state are annually associated with infants being exposed to secondhand smoke. Women exposed to secondhand smoke during pregnancy are at a higher risk of giving birth to low-birthweight babies. When women smoke during pregnancy, their babies are at a higher risk of having weaker lungs than babies of nonsmoking mothers, which in turn increases the risk of many other health problems.

It is very important that you prevent your child from being exposed to secondhand smoke. Always make sure to keep your children away from smoking areas. Most states have banned indoor smoking, but smokers will still congregate in groups outdoors. Make sure to skirt around them, upwind. If you have any smoker friends, ask them to smoke outside (never inside your home!) and to always wash their hands before going near your children again. If you are a smoker with children, consider quitting. Make sure that you have a smoke-free home and car. There is no safe exposure level to secondhand smoke. Also, if you're pregnant, make sure that you keep yourself away from smokers (and don't smoke yourself!). Always remember that it is up to you, the parent, to protect your children and make sure they have the healthiest life possible.

## Online Resources

American Cancer Society: Secondhand Smoke

[http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED\\_10\\_2X\\_Secondhand\\_Smoke-Clean\\_Indoor\\_Air.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_2X_Secondhand_Smoke-Clean_Indoor_Air.asp)

American Lung Association: Secondhand Smoke and Children

<http://www.lungusa.org/site/c.dvLUK9O0E/b.39857/>

eHow: How to Protect Kids from Secondhand Smoke

[http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2258104\\_protect-kids-from-secondhand-smoke.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2258104_protect-kids-from-secondhand-smoke.html)

I Mind Very Much If You Smoke

[http://dccps.nci.nih.gov/tcrb/I\\_mind\\_if\\_you\\_smoke/mindsmo.html](http://dccps.nci.nih.gov/tcrb/I_mind_if_you_smoke/mindsmo.html)

EPA: Health Effects of Exposure to Secondhand Smoke

<http://www.epa.gov/smokefree/healtheffects.html>