

Secondhand Smoke



California
Smokers'
Helpline

1-800-NO-BUTTS

Courtesy vs. Health

For years, secondhand smoke was something people just put up with. Some smokers would ask if it was O.K. before lighting up, and even blow their smoke away, but smoking near others was no more than a courtesy issue.

Today, many people are concerned about the health problems caused by secondhand smoke. And the concern is real. About 53,000 people in the U.S. die each year from contact with secondhand smoke.

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

Secondhand smoke is also called Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS). It is a mix of smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, cigar or pipe, and the smoke exhaled by a smoker.

Cigarette smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals, including 43 which cause cancer. This has led the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to place ETS in the same group with radon, benzene, and asbestos, some of the most deadly cancer causing products known.

Passive Smokers

Secondhand smoke can cause coughing, sneezing, eye irritation, headaches, and nose and throat pain in adults (and pets too).

Children who breathe secondhand smoke are more likely than other kids to have ear infections, sore throats, colds, and lung problems (like asthma, wheezing, and coughing). And because ETS slows healing, children who breathe secondhand smoke usually stay sick longer. Because their lungs are less powerful than an adult's, children are more likely to wind up in the hospital with pneumonia, bronchitis, and asthma attacks.

Finally, even with health problems from secondhand smoke, kids who grow up watching people smoke are more likely to become smokers themselves.

Limit the Risk

Most people don't want to be around secondhand smoke. Today over 90% of Americans are against smoking in public places and many are making efforts to keep their homes and workplaces smoke-free.

For your children: insist that babysitters, grandparents, or other caregivers not smoke around them. It's O.K. to be firm.

For your home: If you smoke, stop. If you live with smokers, ask them not to smoke in your home or car. If that doesn't work, set aside a room for smoking. Be supportive if they try to quit. Also, ask visitors not to smoke in your home, and don't put out ashtrays. It's your right to have a smoke-free home.

