

Secondhand and Thirdhand Smoke

Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is a mixture of smoke coming from the burning tips of cigarettes, pipes and cigars, and smoke exhaled by people who smoke.

Anyone around secondhand smoke breathes in the chemicals from the tobacco smoke. Secondhand smoke causes death and disease in people who do not smoke.

No Amount is Safe

No amount of secondhand smoke is safe. The Environmental Protection Agency lists secondhand smoke as a known cause of cancer in people.

Secondhand smoke has more than 7,000 chemicals. Hundreds of those are toxic and about 70 can cause cancer, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Poisonous gases and chemicals in secondhand smoke include hydrogen cyanide (used in chemical weapons), carbon monoxide (in car exhaust), butane (used in lighter fluid), ammonia, and toluene (found in paint thinners).

Toxic metals in secondhand smoke include arsenic (used in pesticides), lead, chromium (used to make steel) and cadmium (used to make batteries).



Important

- Smoking near an open window, blowing smoke out of a room with a fan, using an air filter, or smoking outside does not prevent secondhand and thirdhand smoke.
- Chemicals from tobacco smoke cling to the surfaces children explore such as toys and floors.
- Smoking also affects your pets. They are at risk for asthma, cancer and other diseases from secondhand and thirdhand smoke.

How Secondhand Smoke Affects Adults

In adults who have never smoked, secondhand smoke can cause:

- heart disease
- lung cancer
- stroke.

(over)

How Secondhand Smoke Affects Children

Secondhand smoke can cause:

- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- ear infections
- breathing problems (coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath)
- respiratory infections (such as bronchitis and pneumonia).

Children who have asthma who are around secondhand smoke have more asthma attacks that are more severe.

Secondhand Aerosol

Secondhand aerosol from vaping is not safe. The aerosol has many of the same residual chemicals as cigarettes including:

- heavy metals such as tin, nickel and chromium
- nicotine
- toxins such as benzene, formaldehyde, lead and toluene.

E-cigarette aerosol contains a higher amount of ultrafine particles that are closer together (concentrated) than in tobacco cigarette smoke.

These tiny particles can go into your lungs, putting you at a high risk for shortness of breath and lung damage.

Thirdhand Smoke

Thirdhand smoke is the chemical residue left from secondhand smoke.

It is what you smell on your clothes, hair, furniture or in the car. Thirdhand smoke is also the brown film on walls.

The residue can cling to surfaces for months. The particles are very tiny and can easily get into your lungs when you breathe.

How to Protect Yourself and Your Family

Smoking near an open window, blowing smoke out of a room with a fan, using an air filter, or smoking outside does not prevent secondhand and thirdhand smoke.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, the only way to protect your family from secondhand smoke is to live in a smoke-free environment.

- Make your home and car smoke-free.
- Ask people not to smoke around you and your child(ren).
- Share information with other parents about the health risks of secondhand and thirdhand smoke.
- Teach your child to stay away from tobacco products and secondhand smoke.
- If someone in your home smokes, only allow smoking outside.
- Wear a jacket or an overshirt when smoking and then take it off when you are done. This reduces thirdhand smoke but it doesn't get rid of it.

Learn More

Go to allinahealth.org/quit or scan the QR code to learn more about quitting and to find resources to help you quit.

