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## econdhand Smoke

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Secondhand smoke is hazardous to our health! As a group leader, you can help others understand how secondhand smoke may affect their health. The goals of this publication are:

1. to help participants understand how and why secondhand smoke is harmful,
2. to help participants think about ways to protect themselves and their families from secondhand smoke, and
3. to raise participants' awareness of tobacco use and public policies in the community.

As you review this publication, note the \* for group activity suggestions. These are fun ways to learn and to apply new information. Also, check the resource list for additional information.

- \* Give a copy of WL to each participant. Ask participants, "What is secondhand smoke?"

### What Is Secondhand Smoke?

Sometimes called passive, environmental, or sidestream smoke, secondhand smoke is both the smoke from the lighted end of a cigarette (sidestream smoke), cigar, or pipe and the exhaled smoke (mainstream smoke). Nonsmokers who breathe secondhand smoke are involuntary or passive smokers. This environmental pollutant is, in reality, anything but passive. For example, a smoke-filled room can contain up to six times more air pollution than a busy highway.

- \* View the video, "Poisoning Our Children." Contact your county extension office to order a copy of this video from the Dorsey Resource Center.

### Who Is at Risk?

Although there has been much attention to the health risks to smokers, passive smokers face serious health risks, too. The 4,000 chemicals breathed by nonsmokers pose problems similar to those experienced by smokers. Anyone exposed to secondhand smoke is at risk.

Three groups of people are especially vulnerable:

- 1 people with health conditions such as allergies, heart disease, and breathing or circulation problems;
- 2 pregnant women and their unborn babies; and
- 3 young children. Even pets can suffer health problems from breathing smoke.

### What Are the Risks?

Both environmental and medical research has demonstrated many harmful effects of secondhand smoke. The greatest risk of secondhand smoke is lung cancer. Each year, an estimated 3,000 adult nonsmokers die from lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke. Passive smoking causes diseases in healthy nonsmokers. Studies show that nonsmokers married to smokers have a 40 percent greater risk of lung cancer than nonsmokers married to nonsmokers. While smoking is an individual choice, those who choose to do so are deciding that the entire family also will be smokers because they share the same residence. In fact, nonsmokers who reside with a pack-a-day smoker for 24 hours experience the equivalent of smoking three cigarettes.

Many other medical problems for adults are linked to secondhand smoke. Exposure may lead to heart disease, stroke, leukemia, lymphoma, and other cancers. Nonsmokers who live with smokers are 20 percent more likely to suffer from heart disease than those who live in smoke-free homes. Those with allergies, heart disease, and breathing and circulation problems make their problems worse when they breathe poisonous chemicals from smoke. A pregnant woman should be aware that her baby "breathes" the same air and that serious health risks may result. In fact, new studies show that secondhand smoke is linked to a higher incidence of miscarriage, low birth weight, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), and growth retardation. Currently in West Virginia, more than one out of every four babies are born to mothers who smoke while pregnant.

About 25 percent of American adults currently smoke cigarettes, yet more than half of children under age 5 live in homes with at least one adult smoker. In young children, problems of pneumonia, asthma, ear infections, and bronchitis can be caused and certainly made worse by secondhand smoke. Passive smoking affects the blood cholesterol in children, increasing their risk of heart disease later in life. When children live with cigarette smoke, they get sick more often and stay sick longer than other children. Not only is this damaging to the child's health, but repeated doctor visits are very costly for families.

The saying that "smoking stunts growth," is true. Research indicates that smoking retards lung development and other growth. Parents strongly influence the health habits of their children. Smoking is a learned behavior that young adolescents acquire through "secondhand" experience in the home. Half of the smokers become addicted by the eighth grade.

In a 1995 survey of 2,079 ninth- through twelfth-grade students in 39 public high schools in West Virginia, 43 percent of the respondents reported smoking one or more cigarettes in the previous month. The reported incidence of cigarette smoking in state youth increased 6 percent between 1990 and 1995. West Virginia law prohibits purchase or use of tobacco products by individuals under age 18.

## **What Makes Secondhand Smoke Dangerous?**

Secondhand smoke is dangerous because it contains some 4,000 toxic chemicals. Of these, at least 43 are known to cause cancer in humans or animals. While opening windows, separating smokers from non-smokers, and using ventilation systems reduce the amount of smoke, the harmful chemicals are still present. There are no "safe" levels of exposure to the chemicals in smoke. This makes smoking both an individual and a public health issue.

Secondhand smoke may be annoying, too. For many people, it causes physical discomforts such as coughing, headaches, and burning of ears, nose, and throat. Also, the smell of tobacco smoke stays in rooms and on clothes, hair, and skin. Since smoking can damage smokers' sense of smell, they may not notice these odors.

## **Benefits of a Smoke-Free Environment**

\* Ask participants to list all the benefits of a smoke-free environment. In addition to health benefits, think of aesthetic, social, economic, and other advantages.

## **Homes**

We spend more time in our homes than anywhere else. A smoke-free home will remove the health risks. There are other advantages: (1) the home will smell better; (2) food will taste better; (3) less time, money, and energy will be spent on cleaning curtains, walls, and windows; (4) insurance rates may be lower; (5) less time will be lost from work or school due to smoke-related illnesses; and, most important, (6) everyone will feel happier and healthier!

It may feel awkward at first to ask people not to smoke in your home. Respectfully and honestly explain the fact that secondhand smoke affects your family's health. They should respect your decision. You can ask them either not to smoke or to smoke outside. Other ways to ensure clean air in the home are to put away all ashtrays and display a no-smoking sign for visitors.

## **Public Places and Work Sites**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has classified secondhand smoke as a "Group A" carcinogen. Group A carcinogens are the most toxic substances known to cause cancer in humans; they include benzene, radon, and asbestos. In the U.S. Surgeon General's 1986 report, "The Health Effects of Involuntary Smoking," one conclusion was that simply separating smokers and nonsmokers within the same airspace may reduce, but not eliminate, the exposure of the nonsmoker to environmental tobacco smoke. More than 90 percent of Americans favor restricting smoking in public places. In fact, laws restricting smoking in public places have been implemented in almost all states. Problems and costs to state and local government have been minimal. Many West Virginia counties have clean indoor air regulations to protect the public against secondhand smoke.

## **Childrens' Environments**

In 1992, the EPA reported that passive smoking is even worse for children than originally thought. Children may be exposed to secondhand smoke in the car, at day care, or at a babysitter's home. Keep children healthy and ask others not to smoke around them. Do not allow smoking the car. It may help to keep chewing gum on hand. Be firm if necessary; a child's health is worth it.

\* Ask participants to think of different ways to get the "Please don't smoke" message across to others. Pose the following situations:

*How should I handle things when I am a guest in the home of a smoker?*

After allowing participants a few minutes for discussion, make the following observations:

Participants might respectfully and honestly explain that smoke bothers them. Be gentle while getting the point across.

*When seated in a restaurant in a nonsmoking section what should I do when someone's smoke is blown my way?*

Ask the manager or hostess to change your table. This sends a strong message to the business owner(s). Participants may opt to dine in smoke-free restaurants or those that require smokers to dine in a separate room having separate ventilation.

*What are some additional ways to support community efforts to assure clean indoor air and influence children not to smoke?*


Contact the state of West Virginia Tobacco Control Program (number is listed on the next

page). This office will put you in touch with organizations, clubs, and key individuals in your county in need of your talents and involvement.

### What Can YOU Do?

1. If you smoke, try to quit. Consult with a doctor for help in quitting.
  2. If others in the family smoke, help them stop. Ask them to smoke outside and away from children and nonsmokers.
  3. Do not allow smoking in the car.
  4. Be sure that places such as schools and day care facilities are smoke free.
  5. Find out about local laws on smoking in the workplace or public buildings.
- \* Play the "Smoke Game." Cut handout of question-and-answer cards on dotted lines. Take turns picking a card, asking the question, and having participants try to answer.

## Questions



1 What is secondhand smoke?	2 What is another name for secondhand smoke?	3 Who is at greatest risk when exposed to secondhand smoke?	4 If a pregnant woman smokes, what problems are likely to occur?
5 What problems occur in young children exposed to secondhand smoke?	6 In the United States, how many nonsmokers die each year from lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke?	7 What does secondhand smoke contain that is harmful?	8 Name some of the benefits of a smoke-free environment.
9 What is the safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke?	10 How does the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency classify secondhand smoke?	11 What percent of American adults smoke cigarettes?	12 What percent of American children under age 5 live in a home with one or more smoking adults?

## For more information, contact:

Office on Smoking and Health, Centers for  
Disease Control  
1-800-CDC-1311  
National Cancer Institute  
1-800-4-CANCER  
American Cancer Society  
1-800-ACS-2345  
West Virginia Tobacco Control Program  
(304) 558-0644  
Your local health department

**Resource:** Executive Summary, West Virginia  
Department of Education, 1995 Youth Risk Behavior  
Survey Results, Office of Healthy Schools, West  
Virginia Department of Education, Charleston, W.Va.

1997: 1M

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ES97-021

## Answers

Miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, growth retardation.	Adults with existing health problems, unborn babies, and young children.	Environmental smoke or passive smoke.	Secondhand smoke is a combination of the smoke from a burning cigarette and the smoke exhaled by a smoker.
A smoke-free environment smells better; is cleaner and easier to keep clean; food tastes better; insurance costs may be lower; and people are healthier.	Secondhand smoke contains 4,000 chemicals, such as carbon monoxide, nicotine, lead, and formaldehyde.	In the United States, 3,000 nonsmokers die from lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.	Problems include pneumonia, bronchitis, ear infections, asthma, reduced lung capacity, and a greater risk of lung cancer and heart disease later in life.
More than half of children under age 5 live in a home with one or more adults who smoke.	25 percent of adults smoke cigarettes.	Secondhand smoke is classified as a Group A carcinogen, the most toxic agents having the potential to cause cancer.	There is no safe level of exposure.