
SMOKE FREE ONTARIO ACT as of May 31, 2006:

Fact Sheet – Health Effects of Second-Hand Smoke

Ministry of Health Promotion

Le ministère de la Promotion de la santé

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Second-hand smoke (also referred to as environmental tobacco smoke) causes disease and death. No scientific authority or regulatory health body in the world has established a safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke.

Second-hand smoke contains over 4,000 chemicals, of which more than 50 are known or suspected carcinogens. Second-hand smoke has been classified as a known human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (an agency of the World Health Organization), the U.S. National Toxicology Program, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Scientific evidence of the adverse health effects of second-hand smoke was available beginning in the 1970's. Within the past decade, several rigorous and independent reviews of the literature on the health effects of second-hand smoke have been published. These included reports of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the United Kingdom Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health, the World Health Organization, the U.S. National Toxicology Program, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer. These studies all reached the conclusion that second-hand smoke is a serious health hazard.

Exposure to second-hand smoke causes about 425 deaths in Ontario annually, not including exposure in the workplace. Second-hand smoke also causes the following diseases and conditions.

In adults:

- Heart disease
- Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of an acute coronary heart disease event by 25-35 per cent.
- Lung cancer
- Never-smoking spouses of smokers have an increased risk of lung cancer of between 20 per cent (for women) and 30 per cent (for men). Risks to highly exposed groups such as hospitality workers may be much greater.
- Nasal sinus cancer
- Respiratory symptoms such as bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Eye and nasal irritation

In children:

- Low birth-weight
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
- Bronchitis, pneumonia and other respiratory tract infections
- Induction and worsening of asthma symptoms
- Middle ear infections

Other diseases and conditions thought to be linked to exposure to second-hand smoke:

- Miscarriages
- Cervical cancer
- Breast cancer
- An adverse impact on cognition and behaviour in children
- Exacerbation of cystic fibrosis
- Decreased lung function

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