



## Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard causing close to 50,000 deaths per year. It can cause or exacerbate a wide range of adverse health effects, including lung cancer, respiratory infections, and asthma.<sup>1</sup>

### Key Facts About Secondhand Smoke

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- The 2006 Surgeon General's Report on secondhand smoke concluded that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Short-term exposure can potentially increase the risk of heart attacks.<sup>2</sup>
- Secondhand smoke exposure causes disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke. Secondhand smoke contains hundreds of chemicals known to be toxic or carcinogenic, including formaldehyde, benzene, vinyl chloride, arsenic ammonia and hydrogen cyanide.<sup>3</sup>
- A 2009 report by the Institute of Medicine confirmed that secondhand smoke is a cause of heart attacks, and concluded that relatively brief exposure could trigger a heart attack.<sup>4</sup>
- Secondhand smoke causes approximately 3,400 deaths from lung cancer and 22,700 to 69,600 deaths from heart disease each year.<sup>5</sup>
- Research into previously secret tobacco industry documents reveals that research conducted by cigarette company Philip Morris in the 1980s showed that secondhand smoke was highly toxic, yet the company suppressed these findings during the next two decades.<sup>6</sup>

### Secondhand Smoke in the Workplace

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- Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke at work are at increased risk for adverse health effects. Levels of secondhand smoke in restaurants and bars were found to be 2 to 5 times higher than in residences with smokers and 2 to 6 times higher than in office workplaces.<sup>7</sup>
- Workplace productivity was increased and absenteeism was decreased among former smokers compared with current smokers.<sup>8</sup>
- The National Cancer Institute found that being employed in a workplace where smoking is prohibited is associated with a reduction in the number of cigarettes smoked per day and an increase in the success rate of smokers who are attempting to quit.<sup>9</sup>

### Secondhand Smoke and Children

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- Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to young children. Secondhand smoke is responsible for between 150,000 and 300,000 lower respiratory tract infections in infants and children under 18 months of age, resulting in between 7,500 and 15,000 hospitalizations each year, and causes 430 sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) deaths in the U.S. annually.<sup>10</sup>
- Secondhand smoke exposure may cause buildup of fluid in the middle ear, resulting in 790,000 physician office visits per year.<sup>11</sup> Secondhand smoke can also aggravate symptoms in 400,000 to 1,000,000 children with asthma.<sup>12</sup>
- In the United States, 21 million, or 35 percent of, children live in homes where residents or visitors smoke in the home on a regular basis.<sup>13</sup> Approximately 50-75 percent of children in the United States have detectable levels of cotinine, the breakdown product of nicotine in the blood.<sup>14</sup>

The American Lung Association has more information available on [quitting smoking](#) and our [programs](#) to help you do so, our [advocacy efforts](#) to reduce tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke, and [tobacco use trends](#) on our website at [www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org), or through the Lung HelpLine at 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872).

Sources:

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