

FACTSheet

SECOND HAND Smoke

Second hand smoke (SHS) is made up of smoke breathed out by smokers and the side stream smoke released from the burning end of cigarettes, cigars and pipes. SHS is also known as passive smoke or environmental tobacco smoke.

INDOOR AIR QUALITY PROBLEM

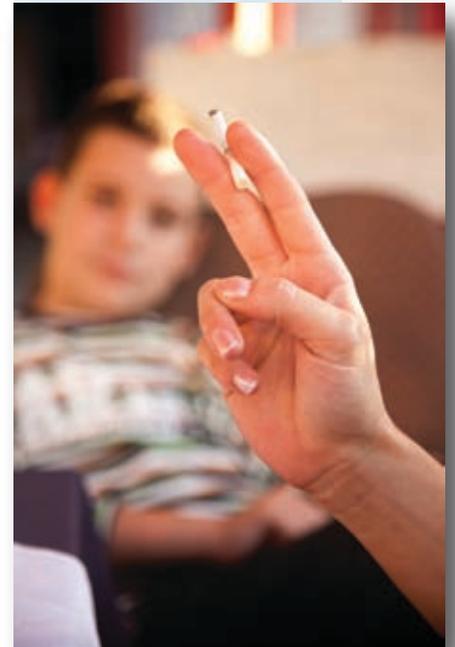
SHS is more than just a nuisance – it is one of the most harmful indoor air pollutants. Smoking is the number one preventable cause of disease and death and in 2008, just over 9% of Canadians reported having been exposed to SHS in the past month¹. SHS contains more than 40 known cancer-causing ingredients including: arsenic, benzene, lead, phenol, formaldehyde, and carbon monoxide. In addition to breathing in SHS when people smoke, harmful chemicals stick around long after smoking ends because they are absorbed by drapes, linens, furniture, and clothes. This is called third-hand smoke. Research is currently being done to learn more about how third-hand smoke can affect human health.

HEALTH EFFECTS

The health effects from smoking are well known: smokers have a higher risk of developing lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and heart disease. Non-smokers, including those who live with a smoker, also face similar harmful health effects from breathing in the many toxins produced by cigarettes, cigars, or pipes. People who smoke and are exposed to radon gas in the home are at an even greater risk of developing lung cancer because radon is the second-leading cause of lung cancer after smoking.

Although healthy individuals are at risk from SHS exposure, some groups such as newborns, children, and people with asthma and other lung conditions are at an even higher risk. Pregnant women who smoke or are exposed to SHS increase the risk of miscarriage, premature birth, or stillbirth, and give birth to babies who generally have lower birth weights and shorter lengths. Children exposed to SHS experience a number of health problems and other issues:

- In the first two years of life, children of parents who smoke at home have a much higher rate of lung disease such as bronchitis and pneumonia.
- There is a link between SHS exposure and the development of asthma in younger children.²
- SHS exposure in children has been linked with lower lung function ability and more frequent episodes of asthma attacks.³
- Many provinces have, or are working towards legislation which prohibits parents from smoking in their vehicles when children are present. With a vehicle being a small, enclosed space, a cigarette being smoked in the car exposes children to a much higher level of SHS than other places. The Lung Association urges all provinces to adopt legislation to ensure smoking is not allowed inside vehicles with children.



¹ Canadian Community Health Surveys (CCHS). Tobacco Use in Canada: Findings from the CCHS. 2008.

² Clearing the Air: Asthma and Indoor Air Exposures. Committee on the Assessment of Asthma and Indoor Air. Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. Institute of Medicine. Washington, D.C. January, 2000.

³ Chilmonczyk, BA, et al. Association between exposure to environmental tobacco smoke and exacerbations of asthma in children. New England Journal of Medicine, 328(23), June, 1993, p.1665-79.

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For people living with asthma or other lung conditions, exposure to SHS may cause a worsening of symptoms (e.g. wheeze, shortness of breath, or cough), require increased medication use, and more frequent emergency room visits.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

SHS is one of the easiest indoor air pollutants to control. By removing the source (cigarettes, cigars, pipes), you get rid of the problem. Increasing ventilation (turning on fans and opening windows) and filtration (using air cleaners or cleaning and changing air filters regularly) will not clear the air of SHS. There are no mechanical devices that can remove all of the particles and gases produced by SHS.

Smoking in one part of the house won't help. The only way to get rid of second-hand smoke from indoor air is to remove the source directly.

Here are a few quick tips:

- Make your home smoke-free.
- Have family members or guests smoke outdoors.
- Quit smoking and support loved ones to quit. Contact The Lung Association for information on smoking cessation programs.
- Work with other parents and family members to help promote the concept of smoke-free families in your neighbourhood.

The air you breathe where you live, work or play is important to your health. The Lung Association is committed to helping you take steps to improve the air you breathe. Call us at 1-888-566-LUNG (5864) or visit www.lung.ca to find out how.