

Protecting families from tobacco smoke in the home

What is second hand smoke?

Second-hand tobacco smoke is a mixture of the smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, cigar or pipe and the smoke breathed out during smoking.

Second-hand smoke contains more than 4,000 different chemicals. At least 250 of them are known to be toxic or to cause cancer – including lead, cyanide and arsenic.

Breathing in second-hand smoke is sometimes called passive smoking.



Children's exposure to second hand smoke

Children are more vulnerable to tobacco smoke than adults because they have smaller airways and breathe faster and their immune systems are still developing.

Second-hand smoke has a number of effects on children's health. In the UK second-hand smoke is the cause of over 300,000 children's visits to the doctor every year - and nearly 10,000 children being admitted to hospital. Second-hand smoke accounts for 40 cot deaths in the UK every year. A child exposed to second-hand smoke in the home is more likely to contract meningitis or to get middle ear infection - 'glue ear' – and twice as likely to have asthma symptoms all year round. Being around second-hand smoke is linked to a greater risk of developing croup and of coughing and wheezing.



Children who grow up around smokers are three times more likely to start smoking themselves when they get older

Second-hand smoke is not only harmful to children, but all others that are exposed to it. Whether it be other adults living or visiting, or pets living in the home. Smoking in doors and exposing others to harmful chemicals, can have both immediate and long term effects on health. Did you know that dogs exposed to second-hand smoke have more eye infections, allergies and can suffer from respiratory disease including lung cancer? Long nosed dogs are prone to nasal cancer and short nosed dogs often get lung cancer. Exposure to second-hand smoke increases their risks.

Smoking in the home and fire risks

Smokers are more likely to have a fire in their home. Cigarette and smoking related fires are among the top causes of fire related deaths. These fires often involve the ignition of mattresses, bedding, upholstered furniture or rubbish, by improperly discarded cigarettes, ashes or matches. Over a third of all fire deaths in the country are attributed to cigarettes.

What you can do to protect yourself and your family

Parents and carers take many steps to protect their families, particularly children. Actions such as locking doors, using child-safe locks on cupboards, securing dangerous objects away from small children are automatically part of lives and we do them without thinking. If you or someone in the home smoke, it is important to know what actions can help to protect others, for example, some might think that opening a window or smoking in a different room can help but whilst this might get rid of some of the smoke, but there is **no safe level of exposure** to second-hand smoke – particularly for children. Smoke lingers in the air and moves from room to room means that the risk remains.



If you can, the best way to protect your family is to make your home completely smoke-free. Take any smoking right outside, and close the door behind you.

Helpful hints

1. Set a date to make your home smoke-free.
2. Tell your family and friends that you want to protect your family and ask for their support.
3. Be positive and remind yourself why you have made the effort to keep your home smoke-free.
4. Make some no-smoking signs with your children and put them up as a reminder of who you are doing this for.
5. Make sure cigarettes are out of sight.
6. Remove ashtrays from the home – put them at the back door or outside for when you want a smoke.
7. Keep a coat and outdoor shoes, even an umbrella, easily accessible for those trips outside to smoke.



Nicotine gum, lozenges, inhalators, nasal sprays and patches can help with cravings throughout the day if you need to stay in-doors. There are also prescribed medications to help you quit. Electronic cigarettes are not completely without risk but are much better for you and others than smoking tobacco indoors

Many people use e-cigarettes in adults as a convenient way to cut down on the number of cigarettes, or as a tool to help quit tobacco smoking altogether.

If you need some free help with quitting smoking or making your home smoke free please call

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