

Search:



## Child Health Month



### Things You Should Know About ETS

- Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is a mix of more than 4,000 compounds, over fifty of which are known to cause cancer.<sup>1</sup>
- ETS consists of two different kinds of smoke: Approximately 85 percent is **sidestream** smoke, the smoke emitted from the burning cigarette, cigar, or pipe between puffs. The remainder is the **mainstream** smoke exhaled by the smoker.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Although mainstream and sidestream smoke are chemically very similar, undiluted sidestream smoke burns at a lower temperature and, therefore, contains higher concentrations of many of the toxic elements in tobacco smoke, including nicotine, carbon monoxide, benzene, ammonia, 4-aminobiphenyl, and benzo[a]pyrene.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1992, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classified environmental tobacco smoke as a “Group A” carcinogen — a substance that produces cancer in humans.<sup>3</sup>

ETS from parental smoking can cause children to suffer the following health effects:

- Pregnant women who smoke and nonsmoking pregnant women exposed daily to tobacco smoke are more likely to have low birth weight babies at risk for death and disease in infancy and early childhood.<sup>3</sup>
- Nursing mothers who smoke can pass along harmful chemicals from cigarettes to their babies in breast milk.<sup>2</sup>
- It is estimated that more than one-third (35 percent) of all deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) are due to maternal tobacco use. U.S. Children are three times more likely to die from SIDS caused by maternal smoking than die from homicide or child abuse.<sup>4</sup>
- Children of parents who smoke have a higher prevalence of symptoms of respiratory irritation such as cough, phlegm, and wheeze.<sup>2</sup>
- An estimated 1.67 million physician visits for cough each year in the United States are due to involuntary smoking.<sup>5</sup>

- Exposure to ETS substantially increases the risk of lower respiratory tract infections, and is responsible for an estimated 350,000 cases of bronchitis and 152,000 cases of pneumonia annually or 16 percent of all lung infections in U.S. children under the age of five.<sup>5</sup>
- Involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke is responsible for an estimated 1.2 million ear infections each year in the United States, or approximately 7 percent of the total.<sup>5</sup>
- Children exposed to household smoking are at greater risk of requiring surgery for recurrent ear infections or tonsillitis; an estimated 86,000 tube insertions (14 percent of the total) and 18,000 tonsillectomies/adenoidectomies (removal of the tonsils or adenoids — 20 percent of the total) each year in the United States are attributable to ETS.<sup>5</sup>
- ETS exposure is associated with higher risk of developing asthma and more frequent and severe asthma attacks in children who already have the disease.<sup>3</sup> Each year in the United States, an estimated 11 percent of all asthma cases and more than half a million physician visits for asthma are due to smoking in the home.<sup>5</sup>
- Exposure to the smoking of one or both parents has also been shown to be a highly important predictor of smoking among adolescents.<sup>1</sup>
- It is difficult to quantify the exposure of nonsmokers to ETS. Smoking in confined spaces, such as in a small enclosed room or a car, can greatly increase concentrations of environmental tobacco smoke.
- It takes more than three hours to remove 95 percent of the smoke from one cigarette from the room once smoking has ended.<sup>7</sup>
- In general terms, most adults (87 percent) believe people have a right to be free from breathing other people's second-hand smoke.<sup>8</sup>
- Parents who restrict smoking to the outdoors are more likely to be highly educated, older, come from nonsmoking households, and have higher incomes.<sup>8</sup>
- Courts in Canada, the United States, and Australia have begun to consider parental smoking as one of the factors that must be weighed in assessing “the best interest” of the child in custody and access proceedings.<sup>1</sup>

Prepared by the American Academy of Pediatrics, 1997

### *Sources*