

Second hand smoke

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Most of us have heard somewhere that second hand smoking is not very good for your health. But have we stopped to consider why it is bad, and specifically how it can affect children's health? They are a vulnerable population because of the potential tobacco smoke has to damage a child's developing organs, such as the lungs and brain (" www. etnet. org," 2010). The children of smoking parents cannot escape these harmful fumes. The exposure is a preventable cause of illness. Therefore, it is my belief that being informed and educating patients regarding the consequences of exposing anyone, especially children, is a small step in order to prevent childhood illnesses and lower spending.

As explained by the American Academy of Otolaryngology, second hand smoke is composed of both smoke given off by a burning cigarette and that exhaled by a smoker. Second hand smoke is also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). The contaminants from EST consist of over 4, 000 known chemicals, 43 of which are known carcinogens (" www. etnet. org," 2010). Furthermore, recent research by Stratford Health Department has revealed a new threat related to tobacco - " third-hand smoke." The latter refers to the chemicals that are left behind over clothing, furniture, walls, and everywhere else tobacco smoke has come into contact with, including the smokers themselves. The chemicals found included arsenic, lead and nicotine, all of which can contaminate by the oral, skin and airway routes. (" Stratford star," 2013). It is clear that tobacco in all forms poses a threat to those who come in contact with it. In fact, a report by the Surgeon General (2007) concluded that there is no safe level of exposure to second hand smoke.

Exposure to many of the toxins from tobacco can affect children before they are even born. A commentary on studies published in the Official Journal Academy of American Pediatrics exposed the astounding finding that showed that children whose mothers were exposed to second hand smoke had later association with childhood obesity. Another very interesting condition found in another study, noted links between child exposures to EST, either pre or postnatally, included with dental caries (Winicoff, Cleave & Oreskovic, 2010). Another study by researchers from the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Nursing revealed behavior problems such as attention and aggression among children whose mothers were exposed to EST. They also performed poorly on speech and language test skills (" Second hand smoke," 2012). A Report of the Surgeon General released in 2007 concluded that a pregnant woman's likelihood of giving birth to babies with lower birth weight substantially increases if she is exposed to EST. This in turn will lead to weaker newborns, who will be more vulnerable to many health problems (2007). Some of these findings are fairly recent, but it is clear that EST during the pre-natal period can have lifelong consequences, and therefore pregnant mothers must be aware of it.

An astounding 50 to 67 percent of children under five reside in homes with at least one adult smoker in the United States. It may be obvious to most of us that the lungs are negatively affected by EST. What many of us may not realize is the extent of these effects. Not only does it reduce lung efficiency as well as its function, but exacerbates problems such as sinusitis, rhinitis, cystic fibrosis, and chronic respiratory problems including cough and postnasal drip (" www. etnet. org," 2010). The US Surgeon General stated

that the likelihood of death from SIDS greatly increases for those infants who are exposed to second hand smoke, over those who are not. Infants and young children can suffer from acute lower respiratory infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia due to exposure. Cough, phlegm, wheezing, and breathlessness are also caused by exposure to second hand smoke in school-aged children. Risk for ear infections are increased, as well as the likelihood for the need for myringotomy tubes (2007).

As mentioned earlier, third hand smoke (THS) is also harmful to children in several ways. Infants are especially vulnerable to contaminants in the environment because they crawl, touch and often put things in their mouths. A local child health assessment conducted by the Health Department found that nearly 20% of parents, with newborns to 8-year-olds in the home, did not prohibit smoking in their homes, and in other neighborhoods this percentage was even higher. This indicates that many parents are not fully aware of the potential harms of THS. The organizers of the research stated these children can suffer from illness more often. They can suffer from ear infections, wheezing, coughing, bronchitis, pneumonia, and THS can increase the severity and/or frequency of attacks in children with asthma. According to this article, other research has even indicated that THS also contains carcinogens. (" Stratford star," 2013)

Finally, to put the issue into a closer focus, in addition to the many smoking-related consequences to a child's health, there are also related increased costs to smoking parents and a smoking-related impact on their children's scholastic future. A study recently published in the Journal of Pediatrics, revealed that the cost of smoking caregivers' lost wages due to time loss and

their child's school absenteeism is an astounding \$227 million dollars per year. Often these smoking parents earn a low income; therefore the consequences of the costs can be burdensome to both parents and their children. The study also established that by eliminating smoking in their homes, their children, ages 6 through 11, will miss 24% to 34% less school than they do now (Levy, Winickoff & Rigotti, 2011). It was not mentioned before, but it is a well know fact that tobacco smoke contains hundreds of carcinogen agents. In light of this, one can only imagine what these children may face with later on in life due to something that could have been avoided.

To conclude, as we advance our medical knowledge, the myriad of detrimental consequences and its effects upon a child's health and well being by the dangerous toxicity of second hand smoke become ever more apparent. It is an unnecessary expense to our children; their time in the classroom and overall health. Parents need to be made aware of the grave consequences of exposure to second hand and even third hand smoke on our children.