



Tobacco Smoke: Don't risk your child's health

Secondhand smoke is a major health concern for asthmatics, especially children. Exposure to secondhand smoke increases a child's risk for not only developing the disease, but also creates hospitalizations and missed school days.

An estimated 21 million U.S. children live in homes where someone smokes at least one day a week and more than 19 million children live in homes where a resident smokes every day.

Early Exposure

Many children are exposed to tobacco smoke before they are even born. Research has shown that, even though a fetus cannot breathe tobacco smoke, children born to mothers who smoke are at a significantly increase risk for:

- Reduced lung function
- Wheezing
- Asthma
- Decreased birth weight
- Development of allergic diseases

Furthermore, a pregnant mother does not have to actively smoke to put her unborn child at risk. An unborn child's exposure to tobacco smoke during pregnancy is associated with an increased incidence of asthma later in life.

The health risks children face from tobacco smoke do not end at birth. For instance, tobacco smoke exposure is associated with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). This association may be related to the fact that infants born to mothers who smoke have a reduced drive to breathe and a reduced response to low oxygen.

Lifelong Potential Effects

The risks of tobacco smoke exposure may not end in early childhood. There is evidence that older children and adolescents model the behaviors of their parents, such as smoking. Adolescents who smoke can experience physical damage from smoking very quickly.

Smoking is a major health risk, but there are steps parents can take to reduce their children's exposure to smoke in the home.

Children exposed to tobacco smoke are also at increased risk for:

- Cough
 - Wheeze
 - Ear infections
 - Bronchitis
 - Pneumonia
 - Allergic diseases hospital admission for asthma
 - Both decreased lung function and abnormal lung responsiveness to triggers
- Children of smokers also are more likely to have tonsillectomies and have more days of restricted activity and school absence per year

To create a smoke-free home:

- Do not to smoke in your home and don't permit others to do so.
- Do not to smoke if children are present, especially infants and toddlers. They are particularly susceptible to the effects of passive smoking.
- Do not to smoke in your car.

Exposure to tobacco smoke can cause a variety of very serious and potentially lifelong harmful effects to children. These harmful effects to children may be experienced both before and after birth. If you smoke, it would be best for your own health to quit. If you cannot quit, please do what is best for your children and never expose them to tobacco smoke.

*Adapted from The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology