

# MAKE SMOKING HISTORY<sup>®</sup>

## Second hand smoke: a guide for parents

### What is second hand smoke?

Passive smoking is when you breathe in another person's smoke (called second hand smoke). Tobacco smoke is made up of more than 4,000 chemicals. When someone inhales second hand smoke they breathe in these chemicals which include some that are known to cause cancer in people.<sup>1</sup>

### How does second hand smoke harm your kids?

Research has shown that being around other people's tobacco smoke can cause a wide range of serious diseases, conditions and sickness. There is no risk-free level of exposure to second hand smoke<sup>2</sup> and children especially are more vulnerable because their bodies are still growing and developing. As well as this, children find it

hard to ask adults not to smoke around them, or are often unable to remove themselves from situations where people are smoking near them.

### *Smoking and pregnancy*

Pregnant women who smoke or who are exposed to second hand smoke can also risk the health of their unborn baby. Toxins like nicotine and carbon monoxide can cross the placenta and affect how much oxygen reaches the foetus as well as the function of the umbilical cord (the baby's lifeline). This means the foetus may not get all the nutrients it needs for healthy growth and development.<sup>2</sup>

If a pregnant woman smokes, the side effects to the unborn baby can include:

1. low birth weight (or unhealthy birth weight);
2. being born premature (or being born too early);
3. a greater risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS, also known as cot death);
4. an increased risk of miscarriage (losing the baby before childbirth);



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5. and increased risk of stillbirth (losing the baby at childbirth).<sup>3</sup>

Some studies<sup>4</sup> have also found that there may be longer term side effects such as learning difficulties and slower growth.

### *Infants and children*

Infants and children are particularly vulnerable if smoking takes place in areas like the home or car. When infants and children are exposed to second hand smoke, they are at an increased risk of:

1. SIDS (also known as cot death);
2. lower respiratory illnesses;
3. middle ear disease;
4. cough, phlegm, wheeze and breathlessness;
5. wheeze illnesses in early childhood;
6. more severe asthma;
7. slow lung growth.<sup>1</sup>

As well as the many health harms, children of parents who smoke are also more likely to become smokers themselves.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2006, *The health consequences of involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke: a report of the Surgeon General*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Centre for Health Promotion, National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services 1982, *The health consequences of smoking: cancer: A report of the Surgeon General*, DHHS Publication No (PHS) 82-50179, US Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office on Smoking and Health, Rockville, Maryland.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services 2001, *The health consequences of smoking for women: a report of the Surgeon General*, US Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, Office on Smoking and Health, Rockville, Maryland.

<sup>4</sup> Weitzman, M, Gortmaker, S & Sobol A 1992, 'Maternal smoking and behaviour problems of children', *Pediatrics*, vol. 90, pp. 342–349.

<sup>5</sup> Silburn, SR, Zubrick, SR, Garton, A, Gurrin, L, Burton, P, Dalby, R, Carlton, J, Shepherd, C & Lawrence, D 1996, *Western Australian Child Health Survey: family and community health*, Australian Bureau of Statistics and the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.