

MAKE SMOKING HISTORY[®]

Second hand smoke: the myths

“I only smoke in another room so the kids won’t be exposed.”

When someone smokes in the home, everyone inside breathes second hand smoke.¹ Tobacco smoke spreads through a house even if doors are closed.² The smoke can also contaminate house dust and surfaces, making these sources of exposure.³ This means even smoking when alone at home is not safe. Infants and children are particularly vulnerable to the poisons in second hand smoke because their bodies are still developing. Make your home smoke free to protect your family.

“But surely opening windows and doors clears the smoke?”

Opening doors and windows, or using fans and air conditioning, won’t remove the risks. There’s no safe level of exposure to second hand smoke and even breathing a little can be harmful.¹ So make sure nobody smokes inside your home. If you’re a smoker, this may even help you to quit. Parents who have a smoke free home are more likely to quit and have a better chance of staying quit.⁴

“What about the car? I keep the window down and blow the smoke outside.”

Unfortunately opening car windows is not enough to remove the risks. When someone smokes in the car, the level of second hand smoke can be very high even if the windows are wound down.⁵ In fact, the level of second hand smoke in cars is much higher than levels found in indoor areas like pubs.⁶ Children also depend on parents to drive them to school and sports activities which means they have no choice but to travel in the family car. For these reasons, it important to keep the car completely smoke free,⁶ even when you’re alone.

“But I need a cigarette on long car trips.”

Not only is smoking harmful to health, it can put you, your passengers and other drivers in danger. Smoking and driving increases your chance of being in a car accident.⁷ To keep everyone safe, have a break from driving in order to have a cigarette - and only light up when you’re out of the car.

“I’ve always smoked around my kids and they seem pretty healthy to me.”

Infants and children exposed to second hand smoke are inhaling many of the same poisons and cancer-causing substances as smokers.¹ This increases the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS, also known as cot death), respiratory infections, ear problems and more severe asthma, and smoking by parents can also slow lung growth in children.¹ What’s more, studies have found that those children who have one or both parents that smoke are more likely to have smoked or be smokers themselves.^{8,9} So you give yourself peace of mind and protect your children.

“I feel awkward asking my family and friends not to smoke in my home and car.”

Parents have the right to protect their children by asking friends and family not to smoke inside. It might be hard at first, but most people will be considerate. It can be helpful to involve the whole family in making the decision to go smoke-free so that everyone is committed and supportive. If someone doesn’t respect your request, be strong: remove your child from the situation and stick to your guns. Often it’s just that people don’t understand the real dangers of second hand smoke, so sharing what you know can help.

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“But my children spend a lot of time away from home with other family and friends.”

Be open with those who care for your children and explain that you want to give them the best chance for a healthy life. If you involve others from the start, they may be willing to cooperate. They may even decide to go smoke free themselves!

Remember, infants and young children are often not able to speak up for their right to have clean air. But you can.

If you're a smoker

The single best way to protect your family from second hand smoke is to quit smoking. But if you're not ready, make sure you keep your home and car smoke free. If you want to know more about quitting:

- talk to your health worker or doctor for help;
- call the Quitline on 13 7848 for confidential counselling and support;
- The Cancer Council Western Australia's *Fresh Start* courses are run in workplaces and the community. If you are interested in attending a course, call the Quitline, or the Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20, to find out where courses are running. You can also access information at www.cancerwa.asn.au/prevention/tobacco.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The health consequences of involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke: a report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: 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; 2006.

² Health Canada, Make your home and car smoke-free: A guide to protecting your family from second-hand smoke. Cat. H128-1/05-437-1E. Tobacco Control Programme, Health Canada; 2006. Available from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/tobac-tabac/second-guide/home-maison-eng.php>

³ Matt GE, Quintana PJE, Hovell, MF, Bernert T, Song S, Novianti N, et al. Household contaminated by environmental tobacco smoke: sources of infant exposures. Tobacco Control. 2004;13:27-37.

⁴ Borland R, Yong HH, Cummings KM, Hyland A, Anderson S, Fong GT. Determinants and consequences of smoke-free homes: findings from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Four Country Survey. Tobacco Control. 2006;15:42-50.

⁵ Sly PD, Deverell M, Kusel MM, Holt PG. Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in cars increases the risk of persistent wheeze in adolescents. The Medical Journal of Australia. 2007;186:322.

⁶ Vardavas CI, Linardakis M, Kafatos AG. Environmental tobacco smoke exposure in motor vehicles: a preliminary study. Tobacco Control. 2006;15: 415-416.

⁷ Young KL, Regan MA, Hammer M. Driver Distraction: A Review of the Literature. Victoria: Monash University Accident Research Centre; 2003.

⁸ Silburn SR, Zubrick SR, Garton A, Gurrin L, Burton P, Dalby R, et al. Western Australian Child Health Survey: family and community health. Perth: Australian Bureau of Statistics and the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research; 1996.

⁹ Zubrick SR, Silburn SR, Lawrence DM, Mitrou FG, Dalby RB, Blair EM, et al. The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. Perth: Curtin University and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research; 2005.