Second-hand Smoke: A Danger to All

Second-hand smoke is a mixture of smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, cigar or pipe and the smoke exhaled by a smoker. You don’t have to smoke to be harmed by tobacco. This information, based on reports from the Surgeon General, shows how people who are around second-hand smoke can also be harmed.

A cause for alarm
There are more than 4,000 chemicals in second-hand smoke. Many of these can cause cancer. If you are in a place where people are smoking, you will breathe in these harmful chemicals.
• There is no “safe” amount of second-hand smoke. Even a small amount can hurt you.
• Sitting in a “no smoking” area, using an air filter, or opening a window, will not protect you from second-hand smoke.

A danger to your health
Second-hand smoke:
• Causes lung cancer in nonsmokers as well as smokers. It may also contribute to other cancers.
• Damages the lining of blood vessels and increases your risk for heart disease.
• Can cause burning eyes and nasal passages, cough, headaches and nausea in nonsmokers. It can also worsen allergies.

A danger to babies
Because their bodies are developing, second-hand smoke can hurt babies even more than adults.
• Unborn babies are at risk from second-hand smoke. Pregnant women who smoke or are exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to have low birth-weight babies at risk for problems in infancy and early childhood.
• Nursing mothers who smoke pass along harmful chemicals to their babies in breast milk.
• Second-hand smoke is a known cause of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

A danger to older children, too
Children cannot choose whether or not to be in a smoke-filled room or area.
• Children whose parents smoke have more respiratory illness and may have weaker lung function than those whose parents are nonsmokers.
• Children exposed to second-hand smoke have more ear infections, colds, pneumonia, bronchitis and more severe asthma than those who are not exposed.

Steps you can take to reduce or prevent danger from second-hand smoke:
• As much as possible, stay away from second-hand smoke.
• Keep children away from second-hand smoke. Do not leave your children with someone who smokes. This includes baby sitters.
• Remember that the dangerous particles from second-hand smoke can linger in the air for hours. Make your home and car smoke-free. Ask your family and friends to do the same.
• If you smoke, please think about quitting. If you haven’t quit yet, avoid exposing others to your smoke. Don’t smoke indoors.

Need help or more information?
The Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line offers confidential advice on how to quit and a free 2-week supply of the nicotine gum, patch or lozenge. They can also refer you to other programs and services. This is free of charge to Wisconsin residents. Call toll free: 800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669).

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem. Aurora Health Care is a not-for-profit health care provider and a national leader in efforts to improve the quality of health care.