

Thirdhand Smoke: A Threat to Child Health

Thirdhand smoke is a danger to children. People with breathing problems, pregnant women, the elderly, and animals are also vulnerable to thirdhand smoke. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children be protected from tobacco smoke. This fact sheet offers information and suggestions to prevent exposure to thirdhand smoke.

What is Thirdhand Smoke?

- Thirdhand smoke is the left-over smoke residue that remains in a room or vehicle after a cigarette is extinguished
- This smoke residue contains nicotine and other chemicals, and can stick to walls, furniture, carpeting, dust, clothing, hair, toys, and other surfaces
- People are exposed to thirdhand smoke when they touch contaminated surfaces or breathe the air in a room where smoking has occurred.
- Thirdhand smoke can mix with other common indoor air-pollutants to create cancer-causing compounds called nitrosamines.

Facts about Thirdhand Smoke

- There is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke¹
- 43% of smokers (65% of nonsmokers) believe thirdhand smoke can hurt children²
- Thirdhand smoke contains more than 250 chemicals¹
- Homes and cars where people have smoked can smell of cigarettes for a long time
- Decontaminating a home or car where a person has smoked may require expensive professional cleaning. Tobacco smoke can stain walls and floors, and the smell can remain in dry wall, insulation, and other building materials
- Smoking in a different room, using a fan, or smoking in front of an open window does not prevent thirdhand smoke
- Babies and children can be harmed by thirdhand smoke because they breathe in toxic chemicals when they crawl on floors, sit in cars, put hands or toys in their mouth, or are held by adults.
- Pets are also at risk because the chemicals from smoke stay in their fur or feathers

How to Protect against Thirdhand Smoke

- Do not allow smoking or e-cigarette use inside your home or car
- Do not allow smoking or e-cigarette use near you, your children, or your pets
- The only way to completely protect against SHS is to quit smoking. Talk with your child's pediatrician about ways to keep your child safe from SHS

References:

1. US Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health; 2006
2. Winickoff JP, Friebely J, Tanski SE, et al. Beliefs About the Health Effects of "Thirdhand" Smoke and Home Smoking Bans. *Pediatrics*. January 2009, 123 (1) e74-e79; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2008-2184>

Additional Resource:

Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center: <https://thirdhandsmoke.org/>