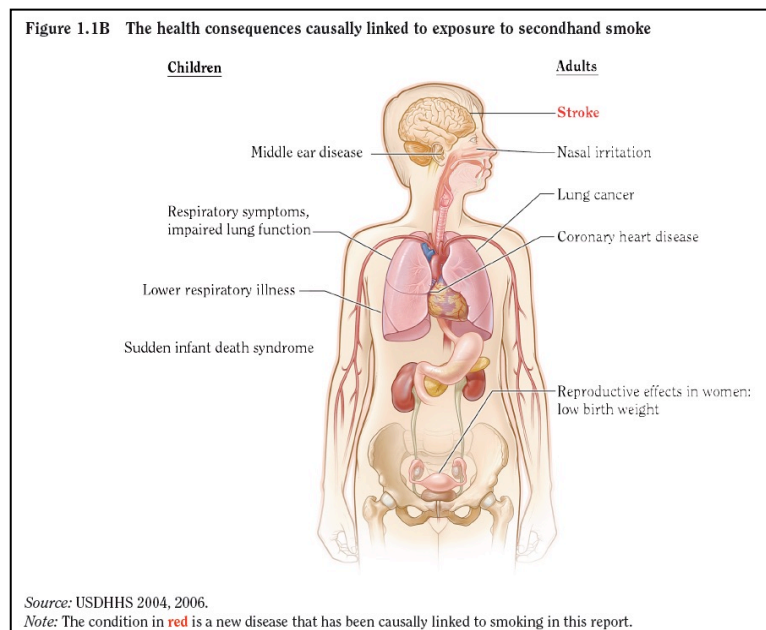




HEALTH HARMS FROM SECONDHAND SMOKE

The scientific evidence on the health risks associated with exposure to secondhand smoke is clear, convincing, and overwhelming. Secondhand smoke (also referred to as involuntary smoking, environmental tobacco smoke, and passive smoking) is a known cause of lung cancer, heart disease, low birth-weight births, chronic lung ailments, as well as other health problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 19,300 adult nonsmokers die every year in the United States from heart disease and lung cancer caused by exposure to secondhand smoke.¹ CDC previously reported that secondhand smoke exposure causes more than 8,000 deaths from stroke annually.²

Health impacts from secondhand smoke exposure



The 2024 Surgeon General's Report, *Eliminating Tobacco-Related Disease and Death: Addressing Disparities*, noted that "Despite progress in the adoption of smokefree policies, the prevalence of exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke remains disproportionately high among (a) children compared with adults, (b) non-smoking African American youth and adults compared with nonsmoking White or Mexican American youth and adults, (c) families in lower income groups compared with families in higher income groups, and (d) adults without college diplomas compared with adults with college diplomas. The magnitude of these disparities has increased since 2000."³

For workers, exposure to secondhand smoke is also relatively higher in service and blue-collar occupations than in white-collar occupations.⁴

- *U.S. Surgeon General (2014)* – In the report, *The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress*, the Surgeon General concluded that:
 - Secondhand smoke exposure increases the risk of stroke in nonsmokers.
 - "Today, the adverse health effects of exposure to secondhand smoke are well understood, and firm causal conclusions have been reached on its risk to the health of nonsmokers."
 - "Exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke has been causally linked to cancer, respiratory, and cardiovascular diseases, and to adverse effects on the health of infants and children."⁵
- *U.S. Surgeon General (2010)* – In the report, *How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioral Basis for Smoking Attributable Disease*, The Surgeon General concluded that:
 - Cigarette smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and compounds. Hundreds are toxic and at least 69 cause cancer. Tobacco smoke itself is a known human carcinogen.

- Low levels of smoke exposure, including exposures to secondhand tobacco smoke, lead to a rapid and sharp increase in dysfunction and inflammation of the lining of the blood vessels, which are implicated in heart attacks and stroke.⁶
- *World Health Organization (2023)* – In its 2023 annual report on the global tobacco epidemic, *Protect people from tobacco smoke*, the World Health Organization reaffirmed “... that there is no safe level of exposure. Breathing in even a small amount of SHS can be dangerous to health.”⁷ As recommended in their 2007 report, *Protection From Exposure To Secondhand Tobacco Smoke – Policy Recommendations*, “there is also indisputable evidence that implementing 100% smoke-free environments is the only effective way to protect the population from the harmful effects of exposure to SHS.”⁸
- In November 2016, the U.S. Public Health Service's National Toxicology Program issued its *14th Report on Carcinogens*, which unambiguously states, based on a thorough review of the available scientific and medical evidence, that:

“Environmental tobacco smoke is known to be a human carcinogen based on sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity from studies in humans.”⁹
- *U.S. Surgeon General (2006)* – In the report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*, the Surgeon General concluded that:
 - “Secondhand smoke exposure causes disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke.
 - Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), acute respiratory infections, ear problems, and more severe asthma. Smoking by parents causes respiratory symptoms and slows lung growth in their children.
 - Exposure of adults to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and causes coronary heart disease and lung cancer.
 - The scientific evidence indicates that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.”¹⁰
- *Institute of Medicine (2009)* – In a landmark report, *Secondhand Smoke Exposure and Cardiovascular Effects: Making Sense of the Evidence*, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) concludes smoke-free laws reduce the number of heart attacks and save lives. The report also confirms that there is conclusive scientific evidence that secondhand smoke causes heart disease, including heart attacks.

The IOM report was requested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the wake of a growing number of studies in smoke-free localities, states and countries that found reductions in heart attack rates after smoke-free laws are implemented. After a thorough review of the evidence, an IOM committee of scientific experts reached the following conclusions:

- “The committee concludes that there is a causal relationship between smoking bans and decreases in acute coronary events.”
- “The evidence reviewed by the committee is consistent with a causal relationship between secondhand-smoke exposure and acute coronary events, such as acute MI (myocardial infarction).”
- “The committee concludes that it is biologically plausible for a relatively brief exposure to secondhand smoke to precipitate an acute coronary event.” According to the report, experimental studies have found that secondhand smoke exposure causes adverse changes in the cardiovascular system that increase the risk of a heart attack.¹¹

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also stated that studies conducted in several communities, states, and countries have found that implementing smoke-free laws is associated with reductions in hospital heart attack admissions. The CDC notes that, “smoke-free laws likely reduce heart attack hospitalizations both by reducing secondhand smoke exposure among nonsmokers and by reducing smoking, with the first factor making the larger contribution.”¹² Based on earlier evidence, experts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had previously noted to all clinicians with patients who have a history of coronary heart disease that those patients “should be advised to avoid all indoor environments that permit smoking.”¹³
- *California Environmental Protection Agency (2005)* – In its report, *Proposed Identification of Environmental Tobacco Smoke as a Toxic Air Contaminant*, the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) recommended, based on their latest, comprehensive review of the scientific literature, that secondhand smoke be declared a toxic air contaminant and therefore be subject to emissions control regulations to be promulgated by the State of California. In this report, CalEPA reiterated and strengthened many of its previous findings regarding the harms associated with exposure to secondhand smoke, including the harmful effects on children, such as sudden infant death syndrome, induction and exacerbation of asthma, increased respiratory tract infections, increased middle ear infections, developmental toxicity resulting in lower birth weight, and impaired lung function. For adults, CalEPA reiterated and strengthened its prior findings for adults including lung cancer and heart disease. The new report also included two significant, new findings including their conclusion that exposure to secondhand smoke causes nasal sinus cancer and that it causes breast cancer in younger, primarily premenopausal women.¹⁴
- *International Agency for Research on Cancer (June 2004)* – According to the IARC, “involuntary smoking (exposure to secondhand or ‘environmental’ tobacco smoke) is carcinogenic to humans (Group 1).”¹⁵ Further, the IARC concluded that there is a “statistically significant and consistent association between lung cancer risk in spouses of smokers and exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke from the spouse who smokes. The excess risk is on the order of 20% for women and 30% for men.”

In addition, the IARC found that “epidemiological studies have demonstrated that exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke is causally associated with coronary heart disease” and they estimated that “involuntary smoking increases the risk of an acute coronary heart disease event by 25-35%.” Further, the IARC noted that, for adults, “the strongest evidence for a causal relation exists for chronic respiratory symptoms.”

- A 2004 study published in the *British Medical Journal* found that exposure to secondhand smoke increases the risk of heart disease among non-smokers by as much as 60 percent.¹⁶ This is the first study to show a direct physical link between secondhand smoke exposure and an increased risk of heart disease. The study, conducted over 20 years by researchers at St. George’s Hospital Medical School in London, measured exposure to secondhand smoke from all sources – including in bars, restaurants, and other workplaces, as well as in the home – based on blood levels of a nicotine byproduct called cotinine. The study is one of the few that has sought to account for all sources of exposure to secondhand smoke, not just home exposure.

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, December 26, 2024

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² HHS. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014:666. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/index.html>

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⁵ HHS. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/index.html>.

⁶ HHS, *How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioral Basis for Smoking Attributable Disease: A Report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2010.

⁷ WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2023: protect people from tobacco smoke. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

⁸ World Health Organization, "Protection From Exposure To Secondhand Tobacco Smoke – Policy Recommendations," 2007, http://www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/wntd/2007/PR_on_SHS.pdf.

⁹ National Toxicology Program, Public Health Service, HHS, *Report on Carcinogens, Fourteenth Edition*, November 2016, <https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/pubhealth/roc/index-1.html#T>.

¹⁰ HHS, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*, HHS, CDC, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006. See also: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/tobaccosmoke/factsheet.html>

¹¹ Institute of Medicine (IOM), *Secondhand Smoke Exposure and Cardiovascular Effects: Making Sense of the Evidence*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2009, <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/Secondhand-Smoke-Exposure-and-Cardiovascular-Effects-Making-Sense-of-the-Evidence.aspx>.

¹² CDC, "Reduced Hospitalizations for Acute Myocardial Infarction After Implementation of a Smoke-Free Ordinance—City of Pueblo, Colorado, 2002–2006," *MMWR* 57(51), January 2, 2009, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/mmwr/byyear/2009/mm5751a1/highlights.htm.

¹³ Pechacek TP & Babb S, "Commentary: How acute and reversible are the cardiovascular risks of secondhand smoke?," *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* 328(7446):980-3, April 24, 2004, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC404492/>.

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¹⁵ International Agency for Research on Cancer, *Volume 83: Tobacco Smoke and Involuntary Smoking Summary of Data Reported and Evaluation*, June 2004, <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Monographs/vol83/mono83.pdf>

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