



# Smoke Signals

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## Remember the Date: Nov. 17, 2005

### *Secondhand smoke: Protect yourself from the dangers*

A burning cigarette, cigar or pipe is a health risk to everyone in the same room. The scientific evidence of tobacco hazards is strongest for smokers. But regular exposure to other people's tobacco smoke — secondhand smoke — also may threaten the health of nonsmokers. Such smoke may cause or contribute to a number of health conditions from ear infections to cancer. By avoiding the smoke, you can decrease your risk of becoming sick from it.

Health experts have recognized the relationship between secondhand smoke and health risks for decades. The research exploring their connections is ongoing. However, some of the known or suspected risks include:

**Cancer** - Experts believe that secondhand smoke is to blame for roughly 3,000 lung cancer deaths in nonsmokers each year in the United States. Some research indicates that people exposed to a spouse's cigarette smoke for several decades are about 20 percent more likely to have lung cancer. Those who are exposed long-term to secondhand smoke in the workplace or social settings may increase their risk of lung cancer by about 25 percent.

**Heart Disease** - Secondhand smoke causes increased cardiovascular risks by damaging blood vessels, decreasing your ability to exercise and altering blood cholesterol levels.

Secondhand smoke also may have a marked effect on the health of infants and children. Some conditions of concern are:

**Asthma** - Secondhand smoke may make asthma attacks more frequent and severe in children who already have asthma — up to 1 million each year. Secondhand smoke is also associated with up to 300,000 cases of bronchitis and pneumonia in infants and toddlers each year.

**Middle ear conditions** - Children living in households with smokers are more likely to have ear infections or fluid in their ears and are more likely to need surgically placed drainage tubes in their eardrums. Secondhand smoke may be a factor in more than 1 million children's visits to the doctor for middle ear infections every year.

### *How to live a smoke-free lifestyle*

The way to limit your exposure to secondhand smoke is straightforward: Stay away from it and keep your children away from it whenever possible. Although air conditioning may remove the visible smoke, it can't remove the particles that continue to circulate and are hazardous to your health. Here are a few specific pointers based on suggestions from the Environmental Protection Agency and the American Lung Association:

•**Stop smoking.** If you smoke, get help with trying to stop, and in the meantime, don't smoke in your home, in your car or around your children.

•**Don't allow smoking inside your home.** If a family member or guest wants to smoke, ask them to step outside.

•**Choose a smoke-free child-care facility.** If you take your children to a child-care provider, choose one with a no-smoking policy.

•**Don't allow smoking in your vehicle.** If someone must smoke on the road, stop at a rest stop for a smoke break outside the car.

•**Patronize businesses with no-smoking policies.** Support with your business restaurants and other establishments that have no-smoking policies. When you have to share a room with people who are smoking, sit as far away from them as possible.

•**Let your voice be heard.** Encourage your government officials to adopt or strengthen local smoking-control ordinances. Even if you don't smoke, secondhand smoke still can harm your health. Take steps to protect yourself from its dangers.

Ready to stop smoking?  
Call 894-2408 for more tips to  
help you quit!