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Secondhand smoke, also known as environmental tobacco smoke, is a mixture of the smoke given off by the burning end of a cigarette, pipe or cigar and the smoke exhaled from the lungs of smokers. It is involuntarily inhaled by nonsmokers, lingers in the air hours after cigarettes have been extinguished and can cause or exacerbate a wide range of adverse health effects, including cancer, respiratory infections, and asthma.<sup>1</sup>

- Secondhand smoke has been classified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a known cause of cancer in humans (Group A carcinogen).<sup>2</sup>
- Secondhand smoke causes approximately 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 35,000-62,000 heart disease deaths in adult nonsmokers in the United States each year.<sup>3</sup>
- A study found that nonsmokers exposed to environmental smoke were 25 percent more likely to have coronary heart diseases compared to nonsmokers not exposed to smoke.<sup>4</sup>
- Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke at work are at increased risk for adverse health effects. Levels of ETS in restaurants and bars were found to be 2 to 5 times higher than in residences with smokers and 2 to 6 times higher than in office workplaces.<sup>5</sup>
- Since 1999, 70 percent of the U.S. workforce worked under a smoke-free policy, ranging from 83.9 percent in Utah to 48.7 percent in Nevada.<sup>6</sup> Workplace productivity was increased and absenteeism was decreased among former smokers compared with current smokers.<sup>7</sup>
- As of 2005, 9 smoke-free states prohibit smoking in almost all workplaces, including restaurants and bars (CA, CT, DE, ME, MA, NY, RI, VT and WA).<sup>8</sup>
- Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to young children. Secondhand smoke is responsible for between 150,000 and 300,000 lower respiratory tract infections in infants and children under 18 months of age, resulting in between 7,500 and 15,000 hospitalizations each year, and causes 1,900 to 2,700 sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) deaths in the United States annually.<sup>9</sup>
- Secondhand smoke exposure may cause buildup of fluid in the middle ear, resulting in 700,000 to 1.6 million physician office visits per year. Secondhand smoke can also aggravate symptoms in 400,000 to 1,000,000 children with asthma.<sup>10</sup>
- In the United States, 21 million, or 35 percent of, children live in homes where residents or visitors smoke in the home on a regular basis.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 50-75 percent of children in the United States have detectable levels of cotinine, the breakdown product of nicotine in the blood.<sup>12</sup>
- New research indicates that secret research conducted by cigarette company Philip Morris in the 1980s showed that secondhand smoke was highly toxic, yet the company suppressed the finding during the next two decades.<sup>13</sup>

For more information on secondhand smoke, please review the Tobacco Morbidity and Mortality Trend Report as well as our Lung Disease Data publication in the [Data and Statistics](#) section of our website, or call the American Lung Association at 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872).

**Sources:**

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*\*Racial and ethnic minority terminology reflects those terms used by the Centers For Disease Control.*