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## Health Effects of Secondhand Smoke

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### Overview

There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke causes numerous health problems in infants and children, including severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections, ear infections, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).<sup>1</sup> Some of the health conditions caused by secondhand smoke in adults include heart disease and lung cancer.<sup>1</sup>

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### Secondhand Smoke Causes Heart Disease

**Secondhand smoke exposure has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and causes coronary heart disease.**<sup>1,2</sup>

- Secondhand smoke causes an estimated 46,000 premature deaths from heart disease each year in the United States among nonsmokers.<sup>3</sup>
- Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or at work increase their risk of developing heart disease by 25–30%.<sup>1</sup>

**Breathing secondhand smoke can have immediate adverse effects on your blood and blood vessels, increasing the risk of having a heart attack.**<sup>1</sup>

- Breathing secondhand smoke interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of having a heart attack.
- Even brief secondhand smoke exposure can damage the lining of blood vessels and cause your blood platelets to become stickier.

**People who already have heart disease are at especially high risk of suffering adverse effects from breathing secondhand smoke and should take special precautions to avoid even brief exposures.**<sup>1</sup>

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## Secondhand Smoke Causes Lung Cancer

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**Secondhand smoke causes lung cancer in adults who themselves have never smoked.<sup>1</sup>**

- Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or at work increase their risk of developing lung cancer by 20–30%.<sup>1</sup>
- Secondhand smoke causes an estimated 3,400 lung cancer deaths among U.S. nonsmokers each year.<sup>3</sup>

**Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke are inhaling many of the same cancer-causing substances and poisons as smokers.<sup>1</sup>**

- Secondhand smoke contains more than 50 cancer-causing chemicals.
- Even brief secondhand smoke exposure can damage cells in ways that set the cancer process in motion.
- Some damage is not reversible.
- As with active smoking, the longer the duration and the higher the level of exposure to secondhand smoke in nonsmokers, the greater the risk of developing lung cancer.

**Smoking causes lung cancer, and exposure to secondhand smoke is an important cause of lung cancer among nonsmokers.<sup>1,4</sup>**

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## Secondhand Smoke Causes Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

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**SIDS—the sudden, unexplained, unexpected death of an infant in the first year of life—is the leading cause of death in otherwise healthy infants.<sup>5</sup> Secondhand smoke increases the risk for SIDS.<sup>1</sup>**

- Smoking by women during pregnancy increases the risk for SIDS.<sup>6</sup>
- Infants who are exposed to secondhand smoke after birth are also at greater risk for SIDS.<sup>1</sup>
- Chemicals in secondhand smoke appear to affect the brain in ways that interfere with its regulation of infants' breathing.<sup>1</sup>
- Infants who die from SIDS have higher concentrations of nicotine in their lungs and higher levels of cotinine (a biological marker for secondhand smoke exposure) than infants who die from other causes.<sup>1</sup>

**Parents can help protect their babies from SIDS by taking the following three actions:<sup>7</sup>**




- Not smoking when pregnant
- Not smoking in the home or around the baby
- Putting the baby down to sleep on its back

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## References

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#### For Further Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
Office on Smoking and Health  
E-mail: [tobaccoinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:tobaccoinfo@cdc.gov)  
Phone: 1-800-CDC-INFO