

Second Hand (Passive) Smoking: Q & A

Q: Is second hand smoke dangerous?

A: The short answer is yes!

Second hand smoke (SHS) contains

- ◆ 5 regulated hazardous air pollutants
- ◆ 47 regulated hazardous wastes
- ◆ More than 50 known or suspected cancer-causing agents
- ◆ More than 100 chemical poisons

SHS (also known as environmental tobacco smoke, ETS) is increasingly recognised as a workplace hazard and a threat to health and welfare. The World Health Organisation and the UN's International Agency for Research into Cancer have declared environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) carcinogenic. A ban on smoking in workplaces protects all workers - including those in cafes, bars and nightclubs.

In 2004, 3 million people in the UK are regularly exposed to SHS at work.

Nationally each year smoking in the workplace causes the deaths from the effects of SHS of 900 office workers, 165 bar workers and 145 manufacturing workers. None of these workers had ever smoked. At least 2 million incidences of illness are caused by SHS each year in the UK.

‘There is compelling evidence that working with smoking co-workers increases the risk of lung cancer by 20-30%, and the risk of heart disease by 25-35% in non smokers’.

(Health & Safety Authority Ireland)

SHS causes short and long term harm to the heart, by reducing the amount of oxygen carried in the bloodstream and reducing exercise capacity. SHS also causes clogging of arteries and the formation of blood clots, leading to thromboses, heart attacks and strokes. 30 minutes exposure to other people's smoke can be sufficient to reduce blood flow through the heart.

In Helena, Montana, smoking was banned for 6 months in public and workplaces. During this time there was a 40% fall in hospital admissions for heart attack. When the ban was removed, the admissions increased rapidly.

Pregnant women who do not smoke but who are regularly exposed to SHS are at a greater risk of having a miscarriage or a low birth weight baby with an increased risk of dying soon after birth. (California Environmental Protection Agency)

Q:What about air conditioning/ventilation systems?

A: These are being heavily promoted by the hospitality industry, but unfortunately, although they might make the air seem cleaner, they are designed for comfort not safety and just don't work to remove invisible and toxic gases eg the carbon monoxide that causes heart disease. A system powerful enough to clear the air would be so noisy that it could not be used.

Q:What about smokefree areas in pubs and clubs?

A: Smoke drifts. The dangerous components of tobacco smoke will not confine themselves to a smokefree area, or room and everyone ends up breathing the smoke.

In 2004, 70% of smokers believe smoking should be banned at work.

Manchester has a Smokefree Homes Scheme designed to help protect the health of Manchester residents, especially babies and children, and to raise awareness of the dangers of second hand smoke (SHS).



Q: Why try to limit SHS exposure in the home?

A: Children have smaller and more delicate lungs and are particularly badly affected by SHS. SHS increases the risk of a wide range of illness & difficulty in children:

- ◆ sudden infant death syndrome
- ◆ middle ear infection
- ◆ heart disease
- ◆ lung cancer
- ◆ school absenteeism

39% deaths in house fires are also associated with smoking.

Smoking in the home is the biggest source of SHS. Forty-two percent of British children live in a household where at least one person smokes.

17,000 UK children under the age of 5 are admitted to hospital every year with illnesses resulting from SHS.

A poll for Smoke-Free London found that only 3% of parents knew that cot death could result from SHS.

Q: Why make homes completely smokefree?

A: Smoke drifts. When cigarettes are smoked in one room in a typical house, airborne tobacco smoke components (other than nicotine) are found in similar concentrations in all rooms.

When people have to go out to smoke, cigarette consumption drops by 30%, and children of parents who go outside the home to smoke are less likely to smoke themselves.

Q: How can I use the scheme in my work?

A: Encourage your clients to sign up to the scheme whether or not they smoke. Encourage people to sign up when they set a quit date. Making their home smokefree helps many people to avoid relapse. Talk about the scheme, hand out registration forms and encourage people to join whenever you are talking about protecting the health of babies and children. Put up posters in your workplace.

Q: Can I sign up?

A: Anybody who lives in Manchester can sign up to register their house as smokefree. Smokers, ex-smokers and never-smokers are all welcome. Sign up yourself and encourage your clients. In return for forms, we send out a certificate, stickers etc. to help remind people and their guests to keep the home smokefree. Registration forms are available from the Stop Smoking Team.

