

Your children are smokers too

Protect them from second and third hand smoke

Ever wondered what is your child breathing when you smoke your cigarette or your argileh? Ever stopped at the door of a restaurant and thought about the quality of air your child will be breathing once you go inside?

Yes you need to think about exposure to second-hand smoking and this should be among your top concerns for your child's health.

Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, 69 of which are known to be carcinogenic. Children exposed to second-hand smoke are inhaling the same cancer-causing substances and poisons as smokers.

Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the chances that children will suffer from coughs, bronchitis, asthma, pneumonia, potentially fatal lower respiratory tract infections, as well as eye and ear problems, among others.

In Lebanon:

→ **80% of children are exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes.** Parents would never accept that their 3 year old boy lights up a cigarette but they would not mind smoking their argileh or cigarette with their child in the same room. This is a common scene where parents smoke at home or in the car or in the restaurant in the presence of their children and they are not conscious about the dreadful health effects of second-hand smoke.

Moreover, smoking in a separate room in the house does not eliminate exposure to second-hand smoke as polluted air cannot be confined in one place and pollutants will travel around the house. Also it is enough to open a window or turn on a fan to clear the air from smoke.

→ **75% of children are exposed to second-hand smoke in public places,** such as in restaurants, cafés, malls... In a recent study conducted in Lebanon, it was shown that 60% of the selected restaurants and cafés have dangerously high levels of particulate matter from smoke.

There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke:

→ Second-hand smoke is harmful, even in minimal amounts

→ Only 30 minutes of second-hand smoke exposure increases the risk of respiratory problems

This is also true for unborn children. Pregnant women should be extremely conscious not to be in a room or a restaurant where people are smoking cigarettes and argileh and get exposed to second-hand smoke. Among the health effects of second-hand smoke on pregnant women and infants are miscarriage, preterm delivery, low birth weight and increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Recently, research moved from studying first-hand smoking, to second-hand smoking, to third-hand smoking, which is the invisible yet toxic mix of gases and particles sticking to smokers' hair and clothing, as well as furniture, carpets, curtains and cushions, that stays long after second-hand smoke has cleared from a room. This residue contains heavy metals, carcinogens

and even radioactive materials that young children can get on their hands and ingest, especially if they are crawling, playing on the floor or on the couch, or even cuddling in the arms of their smoker parents.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

If you are a smoker and wish to protect your family from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke, quitting smoking is the best way. Or at least, smoke outside the house and provide your family with 100% smoke free environment inside the house and family vehicles.

Whenever you go to a restaurant, voice your concern about having a smoke-free restaurant and write it on the comment card. Ask for your right and the right of your children to breathe clean air. By pressuring the restaurants and increasing the demand for smoke-free environments, you can make the change happen.

Joanna Khalil
Researcher
Member of the AUB Tobacco Control Research Group