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Health Department

FACTS&details

about Sedgwick County Government

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Secondhand and Thirdhand Smoke

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is a combination of the smoke exhaled by smokers and the smoke given off by the end of a cigarette, pipe, hookah or cigar.

Nonsmokers inhale this smoke involuntarily or secondhand, increasing their risk of a wide range of illness including cancer. Secondhand smoke lingers in the air for hours.

How does secondhand smoke affect those who don't smoke?

Secondhand smoke contains more than 250 cancer-causing chemicals. Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke inhale many of the same toxins as smokers. In Kansas, it is estimated that 400 nonsmokers die annually from heart or lung disease caused by secondhand smoke. Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work increase their risk of developing heart disease by 25-30% and lung cancer by 20-30%.

Is there a "safe" level of exposure to secondhand smoke?

There is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Studies have shown that even brief exposure to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and increases risk for heart disease and lung cancer. Short exposures to secondhand smoke can cause blood platelets to become stickier, damage the lining of blood vessels, decrease coronary flow velocity reserves, and reduce heart rate variability, potentially increasing the risk of a heart attack.

What is thirdhand smoke?

Thirdhand smoke is the odor you smell and breathe from a smoker's hair or clothing, the interior of his/her car or inside his/her home long after the smoke is gone.

How does thirdhand smoke affect those who don't smoke?

Thirdhand smoke contains more than 60 chemicals known to be toxic or carcinogenic (cancer causing) to anybody of any age who comes into contact with them. Thirdhand smoke is especially easy for small children to come in contact with when they crawl and play on contaminated surfaces or when they lay their head on the shoulder of a smoker.

Is there a "safe" level of exposure to thirdhand smoke?

There is no risk-free level of exposure to thirdhand smoke. You cannot eliminate smoke exposure in your home by opening a window, using air conditioning or a fan, or allowing smoking in some rooms but not others. If you can smell tobacco smoke – even if you cannot see it – you are breathing in toxins. The only way to fully protect your children and nonsmoking adults in your family is to make your home and car smoke-free.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County Health Department at 316-660-7300 or visit the Sedgwick County website at www.sedgwickcounty.org.