

## Asthma children and smoking

Cigarette smoke can trigger worsening asthma symptoms or an asthma attack in some people. Children are particularly sensitive to tobacco smoke as their lungs are smaller and more delicate and are still developing. Children who live with smokers have higher rates of asthma than children living with non-smokers due to ongoing exposure to secondhand smoke.

### Effects of secondhand smoke on asthma in children

Around 40 per cent of children under the age of 14 years with asthma live with smokers and are likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke. This may be the smoke exhaled by smokers or smoke from the burning end of a cigarette. It is estimated that children of parents who smoke are exposed to the same amount of nicotine as if they were actively smoking 60 to 150 cigarettes a year.

Studies show that a child with asthma has more frequent and more severe asthma attacks if exposed to cigarette smoke. In fact, children with asthma whose parents smoke at home are twice as likely to have asthma symptoms all year long as children of non-smokers. These children are more likely to attend a hospital emergency department with asthma and their recovery time is slower after being in hospital.

### Smoking in pregnancy

Studies show that between one in three and one in five mothers smoke during pregnancy. Smoking during pregnancy can severely affect the developing baby, increasing the risks of many conditions including:

- miscarriage
- stillbirth
- complications during the birth
- having a low-weight baby who is more vulnerable to infection and health problems in adulthood
- preterm delivery (birth at less than 37 weeks)
- the baby being born with a hare lip or cross-eyes
- the baby being born with weaker lungs, which may persist into adulthood
- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS or 'cot death')
- the baby having a weaker immune system.

### Smoking by the father

Smoking by the father can still have devastating effects on the unborn baby and may result in lower birth weight of the baby and a higher risk of the baby dying soon after birth. It is still to be established whether this result is due to the pregnant mother's passive smoking or from direct damage to the sperm.

### Smoking in the family car

Smoking in the family car increases exposure of both adults and children to secondhand smoke in an enclosed space. This is unhealthy and can trigger an attack in children who have asthma.

It is illegal to smoke in cars carrying children less than 18 years of age in Victoria.

### Give up for your kids

Nicotine, one of the chemicals in cigarettes, is powerfully addictive. As a result, most smokers find it difficult to quit. You might find nicotine patches, inhalers or gum to be helpful.

A strong motivator is the knowledge that every cigarette you smoke is damaging not only to yourself, but also to your children. Giving up cigarettes is one of the best things you can do for their health and wellbeing.

Parents are role models for their children. Once you quit smoking, you will set a great example to the children around you and reduce the chance that they will take up smoking later in life.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Pharmacist
- Quitline Tel. 13 7848 (13 QUIT)
- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria Tel. 1800 645 130 or (03) 9326 7088

## Things to remember

- Cigarette smoke can trigger asthma in children.
- Exposure to smoke may cause more frequent and more severe asthma attacks in children with asthma.
- Avoid smoking in the car and ask your passengers to do the same.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Asthma Foundation of Victoria

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