Summary

- Passive smoking means breathing in other people’s tobacco smoke.
- Second-hand smoke has been confirmed as a cause of lung cancer in humans by several leading health authorities.
- Passive smoking increases the risk of respiratory illnesses in children, including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia.
- If you can’t give up smoking for your own health, perhaps the health of your partner or children, or other members of your household could be a stronger motivation.
- In Victoria, it is illegal to smoke in cars carrying people under 18 years of age.
- If you have never smoked but you live with people who do smoke, you are at increased risk of a range of tobacco-related diseases, including lung cancer, heart disease and stroke.

Passive smoking means breathing in other people’s tobacco smoke. Exhaled smoke is called exhaled mainstream smoke. The smoke drifting from a lit cigarette is called sidestream smoke. The combination of mainstream and sidestream smoke is called second-hand smoke (SHS) or environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). Second-hand smoke is a serious health risk for both those who smoke and those who do not. Children are particularly at risk of serious health effects from second-hand smoke.

Tobacco laws in Victoria

In Victoria, it is illegal to smoke tobacco, electronic cigarettes and shisha tobacco:

- in most indoor workplaces
- within the grounds of, and at and within four metres of an entrance to, all Victorian childcare centres, kindergartens (or preschools) and primary and secondary schools
- at and within four metres of an entrance to children’s indoor play centres and Victorian public premises (all public hospitals and registered community health centres, and certain Victorian Government buildings)
- in cars carrying people who are under 18 years of age
- at all of Victoria's patrolled beaches within 50 metres of a red and yellow flag
- within ten metres of outdoor children's playground equipment
- within ten metres of outdoor skate parks
- within the outdoor areas of all public swimming pool complexes
- within ten metres of outdoor sporting venues during under 18s events and training sessions
- on public transport
- in all areas of train stations, covered bus shelters, raised platform tram stops and all tram stop shelters
- on the grounds of prisons
- at underage music or dance events
- in all outdoor dining areas where food (other than pre-packaged food or uncut fruit) is provided on a commercial basis
- at certain food fairs and organised events.

For more information on tobacco laws in Victoria, visit the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services page on [tobacco reforms](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/tobacco-reforms).

Toxic effects of passive smoking

Tobacco smoke inside a room tends to hang in mid-air rather than disperse. Hot smoke rises, but tobacco smoke cools rapidly, which stops its upward climb. Since the smoke is heavier than the air, the smoke starts to descend.

A person who smokes heavily indoors creates a low-lying smoke cloud that other householders have no choice but to breathe.

Tobacco smoke contains around 7,000 chemicals, made up of particles and gases, over 70 of which are known to cause cancer. Second-hand smoke has been confirmed as a cause of lung cancer in humans by several leading health authorities.

Compounds such as ammonia, sulphur and formaldehyde irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. These compounds are especially harmful to people with respiratory conditions such as bronchitis or asthma. Exposure to second-hand smoke can trigger or worsen symptoms.

Health risks of passive smoking – pregnant women and unborn babies

Australian data indicates that about 10 per cent of women smoke during pregnancy. Both smoking and passive smoking can seriously affect the developing fetus.


Health risks for mothers who smoke during pregnancy include increased risk of:

- premature birth and low birth weight

• complications during birth.

A non-smoking pregnant woman is more likely to give birth earlier, and to a baby with a slightly lower birth weight if she is exposed to second-hand smoke in the home – for example, if her partner smokes.

Health risks of passive smoking – children

Children are especially vulnerable to the damaging effects of second-hand smoke. Some of the many health risks include:

- Passive smoking is a cause of sudden unexpected death in infants (SUDI), which includes sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleep accidents.
- A child who lives in a smoking household for the first 18 months of their life has an increased risk of developing a range of respiratory illnesses, including bronchitis, bronchiolitis and pneumonia. They are also more prone to getting colds, coughs and glue ear (middle ear infections). Their lungs are weaker and do not grow to their full potential.
- A child exposed to second-hand smoke in the home is more likely to develop asthma symptoms, have more asthma attacks and use asthma medications more often and for a longer period.
- School-aged children of people who smoke are more likely to have symptoms such as cough, phlegm, wheeze and breathlessness.
- Children of people who smoke have an increased risk of meningococcal disease, which can sometimes cause death or disability.

Health risks of passive smoking – partners who have never smoked

People who have never smoked who live with people who do smoke are at increased risk of a range of tobacco-related diseases and other health risks, including:

- Passive smoking increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. There is consistent evidence that people who do not smoke, who live in a smoky household, have higher risks of coronary heart disease and stroke than those who do not.
- Passive smoking makes the blood more "sticky" and likely to clot, thereby leading to increased risk of various health conditions, including heart attack and stroke.
- There is evidence that passive smoking is associated with lower levels of antioxidant vitamins in the blood.
- Just 30 minutes of exposure to second-hand smoke can affect how your blood vessels regulate blood flow, to a similar degree to that seen in people who smoke.
- Long-term exposure to passive smoking may lead to the development of atherosclerosis (narrowing of the arteries).
- People who do not smoke who suffer long-term exposure to second-hand smoke have a 20 to 30 per cent higher risk of developing lung cancer.
- There is increasing evidence that passive smoking can increase the risk of nasal sinus cancer, larynx cancer, larynx cancer, long- and short-term respiratory symptoms, loss of lung function, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among people who do not smoke.

Passive smoking – a good reason to quit

The risks of active smoking are well known. If you are struggling to give up smoking for your own health, you might find that the health of your family or other members of your household is a stronger motivation.

There is a wealth of assistance and support for people who wish to stop smoking. See your doctor for further information and advice, or ring the Quitline on 13 7848.

Reducing the risk of passive smoking

If you smoke but you are unwilling or unable to stop immediately, there are various ways to help protect the health of the people you live with. Suggestions include:

- Make your home smoke-free. Limiting your smoking to one or two rooms is not an effective measure – tobacco smoke can easily drift through the rest of the house.
- Make sure that visitors to your house smoke their cigarettes outdoors.
- Make your car smoke-free. The other occupants will still be exposed to tobacco smoke even if the windows are open. In Victoria, it is illegal to smoke in a car carrying people who are under 18 years of age.
- Don’t allow smoking in any enclosed space where people who do not smoke spend time – for example, in the garage, shed, cubby house, boat or caravan.
- Try to avoid taking children to outdoor areas where people are smoking and you can’t easily move away.
- Make sure that all people who look after your children provide a smoke-free environment.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- Pharmacist
- Quitline Tel 13 7848

References

- Secondhand smoke, 2017, Quit Victoria.
- Secondhand smoke and the health of people around you, 2018, Quit Victoria.

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More information

Lungs

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Lung basics
- Environmental concerns
- Lung infections
- Lung conditions
- Breathing difficulty

Lung basics

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
  
  CPR is a life-saving skill that everyone should learn from an accredited organisation.

- e-cigarettes
  
  What do the experts say about electronic cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes – or e-cigarettes – simulate the act of smoking, but you don’t burn tobacco when you use them.

- Pulmonary hypertension
  
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

- Respiratory system
  
  The respiratory system takes up oxygen from the air we breathe and expels the unwanted carbon dioxide.

- Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)
  
  Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment.

- Smoking - effects on your body
  
  Along with nicotine, people who smoke inhale about 7,000 other chemicals in cigarette smoke. Many of these chemicals come from burning tobacco leaf. Some of these compounds are chemically active and.

- What to expect when you quit smoking
  
  When you decide to quit smoking, it can help to find out what to expect as you work through the process. Some people have only a few mild symptoms when they quit but others find it harder. While.

Environmental concerns

- Air pollution
  
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne's air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions.

- Asbestos and your health
  
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs.

- Aspergillus
  
  Aspergillus is a fungus that commonly grows on rotting vegetation. It can cause asthma symptoms.

- Bushfire smoke
  
  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health.

- Cadmium
  
  Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body.

- Disease clusters
  
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards.

- Passive smoking
  
  Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults.

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Smoke from planned burns

Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires.

Wood fires and breathing problems

The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

Lung infections

- Bronchitis
  Bronchitis is a common chest infection in babies under six months of age.

- Flu (influenza)
  Influenza (the flu) is caused by a virus. The flu is more than just a bad cold and can occasionally lead to serious complications, including death. Specific antiviral medication is available. It is...

- Legionnaires' disease
  Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

- Pleurisy
  Treating any infection of the upper respiratory tract quickly will reduce the risk of developing pleurisy.

- Pneumonia
  Anyone can get pneumonia, but young children and the elderly are most susceptible.

- Psittacosis - parrot fever
  People who have birds as pets, poultry workers and anyone working in aviaries or pet shops, are most at risk of catching psittacosis.

- Tuberculosis (TB)
  Tuberculosis is spread when a person with an active infection coughs, laughs, sings or sneezes.

- Tuberculosis treatment
  Tuberculosis can be cured in almost all cases by taking the medications for the full course of treatment, usually at least six months.

- Whooping cough
  The major symptom of whooping cough is a severe cough, which is often followed by a 'whooping' sound.

- Whooping cough – a family’s experience (video)
  A family shares their experience when their baby daughter contracted whooping cough (or pertussis).

Lung conditions

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - diagnosis (video)
  Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs. Hear from individuals who have been diagnosed.

- Cystic fibrosis (CF)
  When a person has cystic fibrosis, their mucus glands secrete very thick sticky mucus that clogs the tiny air passages in the lungs and traps bacteria.

- Emphysema
  Emphysema is generally caused by cigarette smoking or long-term exposure to certain industrial pollutants or dusts.

- Granulomatosis with polyangiitis
  Granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA), formerly known as Wegener granulomatosis is a rare condition that targets the arteries, veins and capillaries of the kidneys and the respiratory system.

- Lung cancer
  Lung cancer occurs most often in adults between the ages of 40 and 70 who have smoked cigarettes for at least 20 years.

- Lung conditions - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
  Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is the collective term for a number of lung diseases that prevent proper breathing.

- Lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM)
Lymphangioleiomyomatosis (LAM) is a rare lung disease that can affect women during their reproductive years.

- **Mesothelioma**
  Mesothelioma is a rare type of cancer that can develop decades after exposure to asbestos.

- **Nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) lung disease**
  NTM lung disease is a serious disease caused by bacteria commonly found in soil and water. It can cause damage to the lungs and make people very ill.

- **Pulmonary hypertension**
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

- **Sarcoidosis**
  Sarcoidosis is not a cancer or any other sort of malignant tumour.

- **Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)**
  Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment.

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**Breathing difficulty**

- **Asthma explained**
  Asthma cannot be cured, but with good management people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

- **Choking**
  Don't slap a choking person on the back while they are upright - gravity may cause the object to slip further down their windpipe.

- **Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease - diagnosis (video)**
  Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a serious, progressive and disabling condition that limits airflow in the lungs. Hear from individuals who have been diagnosed.

- **Coughing and wheezing in children**
  Coughing and wheezing in babies can be distressing for you and your baby, but in most cases symptoms can be relieved at home.

- **Croup**
  Croup is a viral infection of the throat and windpipe that causes noisy breathing, a hoarse voice and a harsh, barking cough.

- **Pulmonary hypertension**
  Pulmonary hypertension is high blood pressure on the lungs.

- **Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)**
  Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a potentially fatal type of pneumonia caused by a virus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). There is currently no cure or vaccine. Treatment.

- **Sleep apnoea**
  A person with sleep apnoea may wake hundreds of times every night.

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**Related Information**

- **Flu (influenza)**
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- **Asthma explained**
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- **Wood fires and breathing problems**
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

- **Smoking statistics**
  Smoking kills more Victorians every year than road accidents, alcohol and other drugs combined.

- **Victoria’s tobacco laws**
  Smoking kills more Victorians every year than road accidents, alcohol and other drugs combined. To minimise the health effects of tobacco on individuals and the
community, Victoria has laws...

Related information on other websites

- Quit Victoria.
- Tobacco reforms - Department of Health, VIC.

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