



Canadian Cancer Society | Société canadienne du cancer

# Clear the Air

*Protect yourself and your family from second-hand smoke*



1 888 939-3333 | [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca)

## Clear the Air

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### Second-hand smoke is dangerous

Many of us breathe in second-hand smoke – in public places, around doorways of buildings and in cars. Second-hand smoke has the same chemicals in it as the tobacco smoke breathed in by a smoker. So if you're sitting beside someone who's smoking, you and everyone else around you are smoking too.

Hundreds of the chemicals in second-hand smoke are toxic, and more than 70 of them can cause cancer. In fact, every year about 1,000 Canadians who don't smoke die from second-hand smoke.

#### ***What is second-hand smoke?***

Second-hand smoke is what smokers breathe out. They breathe smoke into their lungs, but then they breathe it out into the air around you. And the smoke that comes from a burning cigarette, cigar or pipe – that's second-hand smoke too. In fact, two-thirds of the smoke from a cigarette becomes second-hand smoke.

#### ***Third-hand smoke – what's that?***

Every time a person smokes in your home, the toxic chemicals from second-hand smoke travel through the air and land on your carpet, furniture, curtains and other surfaces. They even land on any dust that's in your home. These chemicals stay around after the cigarette

is out – this is called third-hand smoke.

Third-hand smoke is also toxic.

If you smoke inside your car, it gets coated in third-hand smoke too.

People who smoke have third-hand smoke on their clothing, skin and hair – that's why they smell like smoke even when they're not smoking. And why you smell like smoke after you've been around smokers.

### Second-hand smoke makes you sick

No amount of second-hand smoke is safe.

Being around second-hand smoke can put you at more risk of developing lung cancer. And it can affect your heart too. You're at higher risk for heart disease, heart attacks and stroke.

Second-hand smoke also makes you more congested and cough more. It can irritate your skin, eyes, nose and throat. And if you have allergies or breathing problems (like asthma), second-hand smoke can make them much worse.

### Second-hand smoke hurts unborn babies

“*When I got pregnant with my first child, my husband was smoking in the house, but as soon as he found out I was pregnant, our home became a smoke-free home! Our oldest is now 5, and our home has been smoke-free since then. Also, my husband has been smoke-free for 8 weeks now, and I am so proud of him!*”

Research shows that babies who were exposed to second-hand smoke before they were born are more likely to get sick than other babies. This is because the chemicals in second-hand smoke pass into their blood and affect how they grow and develop.



- Nicotine can reduce blood flow to an unborn baby. This affects their heart, lungs, digestive system and brain.
- Carbon monoxide can cause babies to weigh less than normal at birth. This makes them more likely to get infections and have other health problems.

Being exposed to second-hand smoke before birth can also increase a child's risk of cancer. Children who were exposed to second-hand smoke before they were born are more likely to develop childhood liver cancer.

### **Be healthy for you and your baby**

Mothers who don't smoke are healthier. They have easier pregnancies and labours, and faster recoveries after giving birth. If you quit smoking during pregnancy and start again after your baby is born, keep in mind that chemicals go directly from breast milk to your baby.

### ***Second-hand smoke hurts children***

Second-hand smoke is especially dangerous for babies and children. Their bodies are still growing, and they breathe faster than adults. This means they breathe in more harmful chemicals. Plus, their immune systems are less developed and can't protect them as well from getting sick from second-hand smoke.

Babies who breathe in second-hand smoke are more likely to die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), or crib death. In fact, your baby is *twice* as likely to die from SIDS if your home is not smoke-free.

Just like adults, second-hand smoke hurts the lungs of your babies and children. Studies show that:

- Babies whose parents smoke have weaker lungs and more breathing problems.
- Children who are exposed to second-hand smoke have more wheezing, coughs, pneumonia and bronchitis.
- The lungs of babies and children whose parents smoke don't grow as well as other children's lungs. They're more likely to have chronic lung disease when they're older.
- The chance of developing asthma more than *triples* for children whose parents smoke. And these children will suffer more from their asthma than children with asthma whose parents don't smoke – this means their asthma will be much worse.

It's not just the lungs of children that are damaged by second-hand smoke. Children exposed to second-hand smoke are also more likely to develop ear infections.

Second-hand smoke may even harm the ability of your children and teens to read and do math. Children exposed to second-hand smoke have lower scores on these tests than children in smoke-free homes.

### Third-hand smoke hurts too

Don't forget about third-hand smoke – it's also harmful, especially for babies. Babies crawl on the floor and put things in their mouth. This means they take in more dust than adults. So they're exposed to a lot more third-hand smoke – up to 20 times more than adults.

### It harms pets too

Your pets breathe in second-hand smoke too. Pets are more likely to develop cancer and other health problems if they live in a home with smokers. Second-hand smoke has been linked to several types of cancer in dogs, cats and birds.



Third-hand smoke is dangerous for your pets too. Pets lick third-hand smoke from their fur when they groom themselves. So do birds when they pick through their feathers. This grooming adds to their cancer risk, especially for cats.

## Be smoke-free

We know change isn't easy and doesn't happen all at once. If you're a smoker, try to quit. Or use our smoke-free tips to help protect yourself, your family and your pets from second-hand smoke.

“ I have a no-smoking rule. Even when I used to be a smoker, I wouldn't allow it in my home. Almost 3 years [since I] quit now, and it made it much easier to do it that way. ~ Nikki

### Make your home smoke-free

The best way to make your home smoke-free is not to smoke inside at all. You may think that smoking in only one room will help – but second-hand smoke spreads through your whole home, even if the door of the smoking area is closed. And opening a window or turning on a fan doesn't get rid of the dangerous effects of second-hand smoke.



#### > TIPS

- Have a family meeting to talk about making your home smoke-free.
- Set up a smoking area outside your home for smokers to use. Make sure it's not in an area where the smoke will drift into your home through open windows, doors or air vents.
- Tell visiting family and friends that your home is smoke-free.

- Tell family members who are making these changes how much you appreciate their efforts.

“ *I have been smoke-free for 3-1/2 months now, and I've never felt better. My home has been smoke-free for almost 14 years – hard to believe since both my husband and I were heavy smokers for many years, but not once did we ever smoke in our home. I'm so proud of us, and even more so [of] myself since I quit smoking.* ~ Alice

### **What if I live in a multi-unit building?**

It can be harder to make your home smoke-free if you live in a condo or apartment building. But you can still take action to reduce your exposure to second-hand smoke.

Your first step is to stop the smoke from getting inside your unit. Look for cracks and spaces between the walls and floor and for openings around windows, doors and plumbing. Then, block or seal all these open spaces with filling or sealing materials.

- > **TIPS** to stop smoke from entering your unit
  - Use materials like caulk or spray-in foam to fill all the small openings or spaces.
  - Add weather-stripping around your front door and balcony door.
  - Put door sweeps on the bottom of those doors – these fill the space between the floor and the bottom of the door.
  - Place special gaskets behind electrical switch plates and outlet plates to block smoke.

If you think that second-hand smoke is still a problem after taking these steps, talk to your landlord or property manager. Share your concerns and ask for their help.

- > **TIPS** for working with your landlord or property manager
  - Get the property manager to make the repairs to seal off the smoke if you can't.
  - Ask them to improve the ventilation system in the building so the air is a little cleaner.
  - If the smoke is coming from a specific unit, ask the landlord or property manager to try to block it. They can use the same methods in the smoker's unit that you used in your unit.
  - If people are smoking in common areas – like the laundry room, pool area, stairwells or elevators – ask management to post no-smoking signs.
  - Read your rental agreement. If all or part of your building is smoke-free, ask them to enforce the rules.

There may be other people in your building who are concerned about second-hand smoke. You may want to work with your neighbours to try to fix the problem or advocate for change.

- > **TIPS** for working with your neighbours
  - If you feel comfortable, talk to your neighbour who smokes. Tell them about the problem, and try to work out a solution together. They may be willing to smoke outside.
  - Get together with neighbours who are concerned about second-hand smoke to

advocate for a no-smoking policy in the building or on your floor.

- Share your group's concerns with the tenant association or condo board.

If you've tried everything else and still need help, call your provincial or territorial residential tenancy office for advice. You may also want to consider moving to a smoke-free building if there's no other solution.

### ***Make your car smoke-free too***

A car is a small closed-in space. This means that smoking in a car makes the chemicals from



second-hand smoke even stronger. Some people think that rolling down the windows will get rid of the toxic chemicals – but it doesn't.

Protect your children – don't smoke with them in the car. In most provinces and territories in Canada, there is a ban on smoking in vehicles with children under a certain age. Some cities have their own bans in place.

#### **> TIPS**

- Protect yourself and others by agreeing to make your car smoke-free – and by keeping it smoke-free.
- Clean the inside of your car, including a thorough vacuuming and shampooing to help get rid of third-hand smoke, and then keep it smoke-free.
- Clean out or remove the ashtray.

- Tell passengers that your car is smoke-free.
- Stop for breaks on long trips so that smokers can smoke outside away from your car.

### ***What about the workplace?***

In Canada, almost all enclosed workplaces are smoke-free. If your workplace isn't smoke-free, talk to your employer about ways to reduce your exposure to second-hand smoke or advocate for change.

### ***Outdoor air can be smoke-free***

Even when you're outside, you can still be exposed to second-hand smoke.

To help protect kids from second-hand smoke, smoking is banned on most school grounds. Some cities have also banned smoking in parks, playgrounds and beaches. If someone is smoking in these areas, let them know that it's a smoke-free area and ask them to stop smoking or to move away from the area.

### **Dining out**

Smoking is banned on some restaurant patios, but it often depends on how much of the patio is covered. When dining outside on a patio, ask if it's smoke-free. If it's not, choose to eat inside the restaurant.



### **Outdoor venues**

When you're at an outdoor sports arena or entertainment venue, ask if there's a

no-smoking section. The reserved seating areas may be smoke-free, but general admission may not be. Call the venue before you book your ticket to find out what your options are.

### **Smoke-free travel**

If you're travelling in Canada, it's easy to go smoke-free. Smoking is banned in all enclosed public spaces, including inside restaurants and bars (except in Nunavut). But there are still many countries that allow smoking in public places.

#### **> TIPS**

- Find out if your destination is smoke-free when you're planning a trip.
- Ask for a no-smoking room when staying at a hotel. Even better, choose a hotel that's completely smoke-free.
- Book a cruise on a smoke-free ship.
- Ask your travel agent or search online for smoke-free options when travelling.

## **Get involved!**

Help make your home and community a healthier place to live. Take action to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke:

- Support local bylaws and campaigns that ban smoking.
- Help educate people about the dangers of second-hand smoke. Share this brochure with someone you know.
- Contact your municipal office to tell them that you want more smoke-free housing.
- Do all you can to protect your family from second-hand smoke.
- If you smoke, take steps to quit. Help is available.

“ *For me, second-hand smoke was always about not imposing my dangerous and bad habit on other people, especially my family. I used my kids as my motivation to quit. I didn't want them having a dad that was a smoker. I quit and have been smoke-free for 4 years.*

~ Derek

### **Ready to quit?**

It's okay if you need help to quit smoking – most people do. You don't have to do it alone. *Smokers' Helpline* is here to help. It's a free, confidential service for smokers.

- Call us toll-free at **1 888 939-3333** (TTY: 1 866 786-3934).
- E-mail us at **info@cis.cancer.ca**.
- Visit our website at **cancer.ca** to connect with your local *Smokers' Helpline*.



## What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer, our services or to make a donation.



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PREVENTING CANCER



*Get involved* **Live well** *Be aware* *Get involved*  
*Get involved* **Be aware** *Get involved* **Live well**  
*Be aware* **Get involved** *Live well* **Be**

This is general information developed by the Canadian Cancer Society. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare provider.

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