



Why Second-Hand Smoke is So Dangerous

Because second-hand smoke particles are so small (less than 2.5 micrometres), they can actually penetrate the alveoli deep in the lungs where oxygen and carbon dioxide are exchanged. Each year in Canada, breathing second-hand smoke causes more than 1000 deaths in non-smokers from lung cancer and heart disease, and keeps thousands more from leading normal, healthy lives.

The most comprehensive scientific report on the health consequences of second-hand smoke was conducted by the US Surgeon General in 2006 and should be a wake-up call for non-smokers and smokers alike. The [US Surgeon General's Report](#) warns that no amount of second-hand exposure is safe.

Key conclusions from the report reveal that:

Second-hand smoke increases risk of heart disease and lung cancer

- Concentrations of many cancer-causing and toxic chemicals are potentially higher in second-hand smoke than in the smoke inhaled by smokers.
- Exposure to second-hand smoke at home or work increases a non-smoker's risk of developing heart disease by 25 to 30 percent and lung cancer by 20 to 30 percent.
- Breathing second hand smoke for even a short time can have immediate negative effects on the cardiovascular system and interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of heart attack.
- Persons who already have heart disease are especially at high risk of suffering negative effects from breathing second-hand smoke. They should take extra precautions to avoid even brief exposure.

Second-hand smoke causes acute respiratory problems

- Second-hand smoke contains many chemicals that can quickly irritate and damage the lining of the airways.
- Even brief exposure can trigger respiratory symptoms, including cough, phlegm, wheezing, and breathlessness.
- Persons with asthma or other respiratory conditions are at especially high risk, and should take extra precautions to avoid breathing second-hand smoke.

Exposure to Second-hand smoke harms children

- Babies exposed to second-hand smoke are at a greater risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Babies exposed to second-hand smoke have weaker lungs than unexposed babies, which increases the risk for many health problems.
- Among infants and children, second-hand smoke cause bronchitis and pneumonia, and increases the risk of ear infections.
- Second-hand smoke exposure can cause children with asthma to experience more frequent and severe attacks.

For more info visit www.smokefreehousingbc.ca