

Suburban Pediatrics, Inc.

456 N. New Ballas Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63141
(314) 567-6868
Exchange (314) 362-4402

4217 Bayless Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63123
(314) 638-7330
Exchange (314) 362-4402

Does your child smoke? If asked this question, most parents would answer without hesitation, “No, of course my kids don’t smoke”. Yet if your children are present when an adult lights up, they, too, are smokers. Passive smoking by infants and children is the inhalation of sidestream smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, or mainstream smoke, the smoke exhaled by a smoker. Just as harmful is the smoke found on the surface of a smoker’s clothing or the smoker’s environment, i.e., curtains, upholstered furniture, carpets, etc.

Tobacco smoke is classified as a Group A carcinogen, which means it is one of the only environmental pollutants that have been conclusively proven to be hazardous to the health of both adults and children. More than sixty substances found in secondhand smoke are dangerous to health and promote cancer.

Exposure from environmental tobacco smoke, or ETS, poses substantial hazards to the health of children. The American Academy of Pediatrics’ Committee on Environmental Hazards has found that children exposed to ETS experience more serious respiratory infections including coughs, wheezing, bronchitis, and pneumonia, as well as middle ear infections.

Secondhand smoke is also responsible for the exacerbation of symptoms in asthmatic children and can lead to more chronic symptoms that require more medication. Other studies document that SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, is more common in children of smokers than nonsmokers.

The long term effects of passive smoking are equally disturbing. Children of parents who smoke have been found to have decreased pulmonary function compared to children of parents who do not smoke. In other words, their lungs do not grow and develop as they should, and their breathing airway is narrowed. Because these children can’t reach their full level of pulmonary function, they are more likely to develop chronic obstructive lung diseases like emphysema.

They may also develop heart disease or stroke at a younger age. Research from the Medical College of Virginia shows that children of parents who smoked a pack a day had lower levels of HDL, the “good cholesterol”. Decreased HDL means greater risk of heart disease. Because children imitate their parents, children of smokers are more likely to smoke as adults.

If you or someone you know wants to stop smoking but can’t, contact your internist. The doctor will be able to recommend a program to ease the withdrawal symptoms.

RESOURCES

American Cancer Society 800-227-2345

American Lung Association 645-5545

World Health Organization <http://tobacco.who.int>

US Public Health Service www.osophs.dhhs.gov/tobacco

