

9 Passive smoking

"An hour a day in a room with a smoker is nearly a hundred times more likely to cause lung cancer in a non-smoker than twenty years spent in a building containing asbestos."
Sir Richard Doll, 1985

Passive smoking is also known as exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS) or environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). A passive smoker breathes "sidestream" smoke from the burning tip of the cigarette and "mainstream" smoke that has been exhaled by the smoker. Sidestream smoke is the major component of SHS and is more toxic per unit of tobacco than mainstream smoke.

Passive smoking causes a variety of adverse health effects in non-smokers. Non-smokers exposed to second-hand smoke have an increased lung cancer risk of between 20 percent and 30 percent, and a 25 percent increased risk of heart disease. In addition to harming the mother, passive smoking during pregnancy is linked to health problems in the foetus and infant.

Growing evidence about the health risks of passive smoking has prompted many countries to ban smoking in public areas. While such bans are important and necessary steps to protect non-smokers from second-hand smoke, they are not sufficient to protect young people from the harm caused by exposure to tobacco smoke. Almost half of the world's children are exposed to tobacco smoke, the majority of them in the home. To secure every child's right to grow up in an environment free of tobacco smoke, adult smoking rates must be reduced, especially among parents.

