Tobacco’s Effects on Nonsmokers

Your environment affects your personal health. Even if you do not smoke, being around those who do can be harmful. When people smoke near you, you breathe their secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke is air that has been contaminated by tobacco smoke. It is also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). When you are around secondhand smoke, you become a passive smoker. Passive smokers are nonsmokers who breathe in secondhand smoke.

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

Secondhand smoke comes in two forms. First is mainstream smoke, the smoke that is inhaled and then exhaled by a smoker. Second is sidestream smoke, smoke that comes from the burning end of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar. Sidestream smoke is especially dangerous. It contains twice as much tar and nicotine as does mainstream smoke.

Dangerous Contents of Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is filled with nicotine, carbon monoxide, and other harmful ingredients. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has labeled secondhand smoke as a human carcinogen. This means it causes cancer.
Health Hazards to Adults, Children, and Unborn Babies

Imagine standing in a smoke-filled room for one hour. During that time, you would breathe in nicotine and carbon monoxide. In fact, it would be the same as smoking one cigarette.

Nonsmoking adults who regularly breathe secondhand smoke can get sick from it. They risk getting the same illnesses that affect smokers. This includes heart and lung diseases and respiratory problems. Each year, an estimated 53,000 people in the United States die as a result of passive smoking.

Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children. When children are exposed to secondhand smoke, they are more likely to have respiratory and other problems, like allergies, asthma, ear infections, and heart problems.

Women who use tobacco while pregnant put their unborn children in serious danger. Their babies could die or they could have babies with low birth weight. The lower a baby’s birth weight, the higher the chances that the baby will have health problems. Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is linked to babies with mothers who smoked during or after pregnancy.

Academic Vocabulary
estimated (ES tuh mayt ed) (verb) a rough or approximated number.
At the carnival, Daniella and Miguel estimated that there were 300 jellybeans in the jar.

Reading Check Identify Name two health problems that secondhand smoke can cause in children.

Rights of Nonsmokers

You have the right to breathe air that is free of tobacco smoke. There are more smoke-free places than ever before. There are also more laws against secondhand smoke. As a nonsmoker, you have the right to protect yourself from secondhand smoke. You can ask people not to smoke around you. If a smoker is a guest in your house, you can ask the person to smoke outside. Talk to your parents about asking houseguests not to smoke in your house.

Smoke-Free Environments

Today, the number of smoke-free businesses and public spaces is on the rise. Most public places, including restaurants, do not allow people to smoke indoors. Some restaurants do not allow smoking indoors or out.
Health Skills Activity

Accessing Information

Promoting a Tobacco-Free Community
Many groups work to help people live a tobacco-free lifestyle. As you learn more about what these groups do, you can share what you know with others who want to stay tobacco free. There are many ways to influence others to make the healthful choice not to smoke.

Do some research to find local organizations that promote being tobacco free. Interview people from three or four of these organizations. Ask them about the programs they sponsor and how they let people know about them. Discuss how to become a member. Get the organization’s history.

With a Group
After collecting your information, organize a Tobacco-Free Health Fair to share what you have learned. Invite the people you interviewed to speak about their group and its programs at your Tobacco-Free Health Fair.

Legal Restrictions on Smoking
In the late 1980s, national laws went into effect to fight secondhand smoke. In 1989, smoking was outlawed on domestic airplane flights. Nearly all states also have laws that limit smoking. Employers have the legal right to ban smoking in their workplaces. Most employers now exercise this right.

Laws now control how tobacco companies package and sell cigarettes. Packages must have clear warning labels, or disclaimers. The disclaimers say that smoking is harmful. Cans of smokeless tobacco and tobacco ads must also have these disclaimers.

Reading Check
Explain in what ways do laws control the sale and packaging of tobacco products?

The U.S. government requires tobacco companies to label packages with these disclaimers. Do you think that these labels keep people from smoking?
Hidden Costs to Society

Tobacco products cost a lot of money. There are also hidden costs of tobacco use. Tobacco-related illnesses, such as lung cancer and emphysema, often require the person to be in the hospital. Hospital stays and treatments for these illnesses are very expensive. These preventable costs affect the health care system.

Tobacco Strains the Health Care System

People who use tobacco tend to need medical treatment more often than those who do not. If tobacco users have health insurance, it may help them pay some of the costs of their treatment. However, because health insurance companies face more costs to cover tobacco users, they charge tobacco users higher rates for their health insurance. If a tobacco user has no health insurance, the government helps cover the costs. This means that every U.S. family pays, too, as part of their taxes. It is estimated that taxpayers pay about $38 billion each year, whether or not they smoke.

Reading Check Describe How can tobacco use affect how much people pay for health insurance?

Lesson 4 Review

After You Read Review this lesson for new terms, major headings, and Reading Checks.

What I Learned

1. **Vocabulary** Define **sidestream smoke** and **mainstream smoke**.
2. **Explain** Describe the effects smoking can have on an unborn baby.
3. **Explain** Why do tobacco users pay more for health insurance?
4. **Explain** Why do nonsmokers have to pay to cover part of the cost of smokers’ medical treatments?

Thinking Critically

5. **Analyze** How can laws to protect you from secondhand smoke help to protect your health?
6. **Apply** Imagine that you are sitting in the nonsmoking section of a restaurant. What would you do if the smoke from the smoking section bothered you?

Applying Health Skills

7. **Accessing Information** Research the latest restrictions on tobacco ads. Write a paragraph describing your findings.