



Secondhand Smoke Outdoors

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is secondhand smoke really that bad?

Yes. Researchers have reported and confirmed the negative health effects of secondhand smoke for decades. Inhaled secondhand smoke is approximately **four times** more toxic than the smoke inhaled by the person. The 2006 Surgeon General's Report states that secondhand smoke causes premature death and disease in children and adults. The report also states that children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, acute respiratory infections, ear problems, and severe asthma.

2. Why should we be worried about exposure to secondhand smoke outdoors?

Tobacco smoke is very hot when released from the lit cigarette, cigar, or pipe, which makes the smoke rise for a short while. The initial visual observation gives the impression that outdoor cigarette smoke harmlessly rises into the atmosphere and away from people. However, the *truth* is that the smoke, along with concentrated gases, particles and cancer-causing chemicals, quickly cools off, becomes invisible, and descends. While descending, the toxic air swirls around nearby children and adults, contaminating their breathing space. Because of this, the California Air Resources Board has identified secondhand smoke as a toxic air contaminant.

3. Isn't the amount of secondhand smoke outside that people encounter negligible?

No. The toxic chemicals are highly concentrated. Most recently, a Stanford University study found that an individual near a person who is smoking outdoors might inhale a breath that contains 50 times more toxic materials than if they were breathing near a non-smoker. Recent research also shows that exposure to secondhand smoke for as little as 30 minutes can affect the adult heart adversely.

4. What can be done to limit exposure to secondhand smoke outdoors?

Hundreds of local governments, institutions, and many other places around California, the United States, and the world are restricting smoking not only indoors, but outdoors as well. Communities are protecting individuals from harmful exposure by developing and implementing smoke-free policies at parks, campuses, beaches, restaurant and bar patio areas, service lines, and many other public places.

5. Is there a history of the State of California and/or local governments within California enacting laws that protect individuals from a known hazard?

Yes. The California Department of Public Health notes that in the past, government has imposed limits on personal activities in private and public spaces, based on the existence of a danger without alternative means to effectively reduce risk or harm. For example, seatbelt and bicycle helmet requirements, child safety seat requirements, and personal flotation device regulations were all enacted to protect public health and safety. For over 30 years, California has protected its residents from secondhand smoke, starting with smoke-free grocery stores.

"The debate is over. The science is clear. Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance but a serious health hazard."

-- 2006 Surgeon General's Report