



---

*From the Expert...*

## Secondhand Smoke and Children's Health

By Susan R. Altman, MPH



*Ms. Altman serves as the Local Support Coordinator for the Alabama Department of Public Health Area Tobacco Prevention and Control Unit. She earned her Master of Public Health degree, with a concentration in Health Promotion, from Florida International University in 1999 and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Florida Atlantic University in 1997. Ms. Altman has spent most of her career working in the field of Health Promotion. She has served in the Florida Tobacco Prevention and Control Program as well as other youth-oriented initiatives.*

Every day, children and adults throughout the nation breathe air contaminated with chemicals such as formaldehyde, arsenic, and hydrogen cyanide, just to name a few. By now, you are probably thinking that these people must live next to a toxic waste facility. Most do not. Rather, they are breathing the smoke coming from the burning end of a cigarette – known as secondhand smoke.

Secondhand tobacco smoke contains more than 250 toxic or cancer-causing chemicals and causes serious health problems. Yet, according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, more than 289,000 children in Alabama are exposed to secondhand smoke at home. The health hazards of secondhand smoke exposure are reported in the 2006 Surgeon General's Report on the Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke.

Secondhand smoke exposure hurts people of all ages, but babies, children, the elderly and people with health problems are particularly at risk of getting sick or dying. Unborn babies are hurt when their mothers smoke or when others smoke around their mothers. Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke while in the womb or after being born are more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS. SIDS is defined as the sudden, unexplained death of a baby before age one. Doctors believe that changes in the baby's brain or lungs that affect how the baby breathes may be linked to SIDS.

Secondhand smoke is also a known cause of low birth weight and underdeveloped lungs in babies. Studies show babies whose mothers smoke or whose mothers are exposed to smoke are more likely to be born with lung problems. Babies who breathe smoke after birth also have weaker lungs and can continue to have problems as they grow older and into adulthood. Secondhand smoke exposure can result in a lifetime of health issues.

Older children are also hurt by secondhand smoke. They are more likely to have lung problems

---

*From the Expert...*

## Secondhand Smoke and Children's Health

---

such as pneumonia and bronchitis. Wheezing and coughing are more common in children who breathe smoke. Studies show that more than 40 percent of the children who go to the emergency room for asthma live with smokers. In addition, children whose parents smoke around them get more ear infections and are more likely to need operations to relieve fluid in their ears. Adults also suffer from exposure to secondhand smoke. It is a known cause of lung cancer and heart disease. Doctors often advise people with heart problems to stay away from places where people are smoking. Even a short time of exposure causes a person's blood platelets to stick together, which can lead to a deadly heart attack. In addition, secondhand smoke exposure may cause other serious diseases throughout the body.

Businesses, particularly restaurants, must often decide whether or not to allow smoking. Most Alabamians (77.5%) do not smoke. According to the 2006 Zagat Survey America's Top Restaurants, 89 percent of customers prefer to eat in smoke-free environments. The 2005 Gallup Poll also found that most Americans favor smoke-free public places. According to the American Cancer Society opinion poll conducted in January, 2008, 78% of registered voters surveyed in Alabama favor a law making all workplaces smoke-free. Many restaurants across the nation have decided to go smoke-free on their own as a means of increasing businesses.

In addition, numerous studies have been conducted to determine the economic impact of laws requiring smoke-free public places. The results of all credible, peer-reviewed studies show that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have a negative impact on business revenues. In fact, businesses in many states and municipalities have reported increased profits after passing laws requiring smoke-free public places.

Secondhand tobacco smoke is not just a nuisance. It is a serious health hazard for people of all ages. For more information on what you can do to protect yourself and your family, call Susan Altman at (334) 206-2776 or visit the Alabama Department of Public Health Tobacco Prevention and Control Program website, at [www.adph.org/tobacco](http://www.adph.org/tobacco). For free help to quit smoking, call the Alabama Department of Public Health Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800 784-8669).



*Readers are welcome and encouraged to forward this publication to anyone who might be interested. If you have been forwarded a copy and would like to subscribe, please visit us online at [www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org) to sign up for Enews or send a message to [SubscribeEnews@alavoices.org](mailto:SubscribeEnews@alavoices.org) and give your name, organization (if applicable), and e-mail address. If you have received this newsletter in error or do not wish to continue receiving this newsletter, please call 334-213-2410, Ext. 100 or send an e-mail to [UnsubscribeEnews@alavoices.org](mailto:UnsubscribeEnews@alavoices.org).*



P. O. Box 4576      Montgomery, AL 36103-4576  
334-213-2410 -or- 800-444-KIDS (5437)      Fax: 334-213-2413  
[vfac@alavoices.org](mailto:vfac@alavoices.org)      [www.alavoices.org](http://www.alavoices.org)