

Secondhand smoke (SHS) is the toxic mixture of smoke that comes from a burning tobacco product, such as a cigarette, cigar, or pipe, and smoke exhaled by the smoker.¹

- There is no safe level of SHS—it is dangerous to anyone who breathes it in.
- SHS contains over 7,000 poisonous chemicals, and at least 250 have been shown to damage your health.
- The smoke can linger in the air for several hours after someone smokes.
- Your body can suffer harmful effects even after breathing SHS for a short period of time.
- Repeated exposure to SHS can cause serious health issues in non-smokers like lung cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Key Points:

- No level of SHS is safe to breathe.
- Children and babies are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of SHS.
- Eliminating smoking in indoor spaces is the only way to fully protect non-smokers from SHS exposure.
- About 30% of non-smoking CT adults and 38% of youth were recently exposed to SHS in a public place.

SHS is especially dangerous for children, babies, and women who are pregnant. A few of the more serious health effects include:¹

- SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). Babies whose moms smoke while pregnant or who are exposed to SHS after birth are more likely to die from SIDS.



- In 2013, among women in Connecticut who were in their childbearing years (aged 18-44 years), 15.7% were current cigarette smokers.²
- In 2011, among women in Connecticut who gave birth, 4.6% reported smoking during pregnancy.³
- Between 2005 and 2011 there were 122 SIDS cases in Connecticut;³ it is estimated that 9 or 10 of these deaths can be attributed to exposure to SHS toxins.⁴

- Severe asthma. SHS causes kids who already have asthma to get more frequent and severe attacks.

- Data from the 2013 Connecticut Youth Tobacco Survey estimated that, of the 10.5% of middle and high school students who reported having an episode of asthma or an asthma attack in the past 12 months, 48.9% were living with a smoker or had been exposed to SHS at home or in a car during the seven days before the survey.

- Breathing problems. Children whose parents smoke around them get bronchitis and pneumonia more often. SHS also causes lung problems, including coughing, too much phlegm, wheezing, and breathlessness among school-aged children.

Eliminating smoking in indoor spaces is the only way to fully protect non-smokers from SHS exposure. Separating smokers from non-smokers in the same air space (like “no smoking” sections in restaurants or casinos), cleaning the air, opening windows, or ventilating buildings does not completely get rid of SHS.¹

In 2004, Connecticut enacted the Clean Indoor Air Act. This statute prohibits smoking in many workplaces and in restaurants and bars. Despite this law, more work needs to be done:

- Data from the 2010 Connecticut Adult Tobacco Survey estimated that, in the seven days prior to the survey, 39.4% of non-smoking adults were exposed to SHS—17.0% were exposed in their workplace, 4.5% at home, 7.1% in a vehicle, and 30.3% in a public place.
- Data from the 2013 Connecticut Youth Tobacco Survey estimated that 31.8% of middle and high school students live with someone who smokes cigarettes, cigars, or pipes. And, in the seven days prior to the survey, 18.3% were at home when someone smoked a tobacco product; 20.5% were in a vehicle with someone who was smoking; 21.7% breathed the smoke from someone who was smoking a tobacco product at their school; and 38.0% were exposed to SHS in an indoor or outdoor public place.

For Further Information

Connecticut Department of Public Health
Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program
410 Capitol Avenue
PO Box 340308, MS #11HLS
Hartford, CT 06134-0308
Phone: 860-509-8251
Or Visit: www.ct.gov/dph/tobacco

References

- ¹Tobacco Control Research Branch of the National Cancer Institute; <http://smokefree.gov>.
²Results from the Connecticut Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey; 2013.
³CT DPH; Office of Vital Records; Registration Reports; 2011.
⁴CDC, MCH SAMMEC; Health Outcomes Report; <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/sammec>.