secondhand smoke

what is it and what can you do about it?

Information about secondhand smoke plus practical advice on protecting yourself from the effects.
It is now against the law to smoke in enclosed public places in Wales.
The introduction of the smoking ban in all public places in Wales is a significant step forward in safeguarding the health of employees and the general public from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke. It is estimated that 400 deaths will be prevented among non-smokers every year in Wales now that this law is in place.

This leaflet looks at what second-hand smoke is and how it can affect your health. It also considers other environments where you or your family may be exposed to secondhand smoke and provides advice on ways to minimise the risks in these situations.

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is other people’s tobacco smoke. It is also known as passive smoking.

Tobacco smoke in the atmosphere is called secondhand smoke, too.

Secondhand smoke is a major source of indoor air pollution. It can lead to heart disease and lung cancer, and make illnesses like asthma worse.

Secondhand smoke is made up of two types of smoke:

• Mainstream smoke is smoke breathed in and out by smokers.

• Sidestream smoke comes from the end of a burning cigarette or cigar and makes up 85 per cent of the smoke in a smoky environment. This type of smoke contains more toxins and nicotine than mainstream smoke.
Tobacco smoke contains a cocktail of around 4,000 chemicals many of which are poisonous and cause cancer and heart disease.
What’s in tobacco smoke?

Tobacco smoke contains around 4,000 different chemicals. Many of them are poisonous and some can cause cancer. Three of the main components are:

- **Nicotine** – a powerful, addictive drug. It increases the heart rate and blood pressure, and affects mood and behaviour. Nicotine is also an insecticide.

- **Tar** – many of the substances in tar are known to cause cancer. It can also damage the lungs.

- **Carbon monoxide** – a gas that takes the place of oxygen in the blood, making the lungs less efficient and stopping cells and tissues getting the oxygen they need to work properly. Carbon monoxide is the poisonous gas found in car exhaust fumes.

Other chemicals in tobacco smoke include:

- **Benzene** – a poisonous gas found in petrol fumes, known to cause leukaemia.

- **Ethanol** – used in anti-freeze.

- **Ammonia** – used in anti-personnel spray and cleaning products.

- **Formaldehyde** – an embalming fluid.

- **Hydrogen cyanide** – an industrial pollutant.

- **Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH)** – a cancer-causing chemical also found in diesel exhaust and other combustion products.
WARNING

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.
The effects of secondhand smoke
Effects you might notice straight away

- Coughing
- Headache
- Eye irritation
- Sore throat
- Sneezing and runny nose
- Feeling sick
- Breathing problems (and possibly an asthma attack)
- Irregular heartbeat (a particular problem for people with heart disease)

Long-term effects

- Worsening of chest problems and allergies like asthma, hay fever, bronchitis and emphysema.
- Increased risk of heart disease.
- Increased risk of lung cancer.
- Pregnant women exposed to secondhand smoke can pass on the harmful gases and chemicals to their babies.
Babies and children exposed to secondhand smoke are twice as likely to have asthma attacks and chest infections.
Secondhand smoke and children

The effects of secondhand smoke on children can be more serious because their bodies are still developing. Babies exposed to secondhand smoke have a higher risk of cot death. Children suffer more asthma attacks and chest infections and are more likely to develop ear infections and ‘glue ear’. Some research suggests that there is a link between secondhand smoke and meningitis.

Often, children can’t control whether or not they are exposed to secondhand smoke, so adults have a responsibility to protect them. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child state that every child has the right to grow up in a smoke-free environment.

For practical advice on protecting children from secondhand smoke, see P is for protecting babies and children from second hand smoke. You can get copies by emailing tobaccopolicybranch@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Secondhand smoke can increase the risk of heart disease by 25% and lung cancer by 24% in non-smokers.
Secondhand smoke behind closed doors...

Now that enclosed public places are smoke-free it’s much easier to avoid smoky environments when you are out and about. The new smoking law prohibits smoking in all public places which includes workplaces. However, it’s often the places we feel safest that put us at the greatest risk. This next section outlines actions you can take to avoid smoky environments that occur behind closed doors.

In the home

If you smoke, protect others from your tobacco smoke by keeping your home smoke-free - always smoke outside.

If you don’t smoke, protect yourself and your family from secondhand smoke by keeping your home smoke-free - ask family members and visitors to smoke outside at all times.

Let’s face it - nobody likes to tell friends or family members where they can and cannot smoke. However, tobacco smoke isn’t so polite and it can hang around for hours in enclosed environments. If you have allowed someone to smoke in your home open the windows or doors to ventilate the room as soon as possible.
It is estimated that secondhand smoke is responsible for more than 10,000 premature deaths a year in the UK.
In the car

The new smoking law protects you when using all public transport. However, when we are in our car or car sharing we don’t have the same level of protection. Here are a few tips to keep your journeys smoke-free.

If you are a smoker

Protect your passengers when on the road by smoking before you set off on a short trip rather than in the car. And on longer trips, stop and smoke outside the car away from your other passengers.

If you are a non-smoker

Car sharing is both environmentally friendly as well as a good way to keep your petrol costs down and save money. However, consider the impact that sharing a car with a smoker could have on your health. Perhaps you could suggest that they take the actions detailed above if you feel your health is at risk. It is not advisable that you share a car on long journeys if your driver or passenger insists on smoking within the vehicle.

Remember, the best way to protect yourself and other people from the effects of tobacco smoke is to stop smoking. For friendly and practical advice on giving up, call the Smokers Helpline Wales on freephone 0800 169 0 169.
SUCCESS

You are 4 times more likely to stay stopped by using your local Stop Smoking Service combined with Nicotine Replacement Therapy than by willpower alone.
Need help to give up smoking?

Call the Smokers Helpline Wales on 0800 169 0 169 for friendly and practical advice on giving up smoking. The adviser can also put you in touch with your local stop smoking service.

You can also contact your local stop smoking service direct for free and friendly advice and support to help you quit. Contact the Stop Smoking Wales Service on 0800 085 2219.

Smokers Helpline Wales  
0800 169 0 169

Stop Smoking Wales Service  
0800 085 2219

NHS Asian Tobacco Helplines

0800 169 0 881 (Urdu)  
0800 169 0 884 (Gujarati)

0800 169 0 882 (Punjabi)  
0800 169 0 885 (Bengali)

0800 169 0 883 (Hindi)

More information

For more information about the ban on smoking in public places in Wales visit: www.smokingbanwales.co.uk

For more information on any of the topics in this leaflet, contact the following organisations:

ASH Wales  
029 2064 1101  
www.ashwales.co.uk

No Smoking Day  
020 7739 5110  
www.nosmokingday.org.uk

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation  
0151 254 7200  
www.roycastle.org

Quit  
0800 00 22 00  
www.quit.org.uk
Peidiwch â rhoi’r gorau i roi’r gorau iddi.

Don't give up giving up.