



Questions and Answers about Thirdhand Smoke

Q. What is thirdhand smoke?

- A. Sometimes called “tobacco smoke residue”, thirdhand smoke is what’s left after the cigarette is extinguished. When smoking occurs in a home, car or motel room, nicotine in the form of a vapor is released, and this sticky residue is absorbed in furniture, carpeting, drapes and in dust. Nicotine can persist on those materials for days, weeks and even months. Researchers fear this residue could be particularly harmful to toddlers and the elderly as well as anyone who comes in close contact with contaminated surfaces.

Q. Is thirdhand smoke really that dangerous?

- A. The nicotine released from smoking in a home reacts with the common indoor air pollutant nitrous acid to produce dangerous carcinogens. Preliminary research by Matt and others suggests the same chemicals that leave a stale cigarette odor on clothes and upholstery also can be swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin of non-smokers. Though scientists have extensive evidence about the damage caused by secondhand smoke, they know relatively little about the potential health risks of thirdhand exposure. Many of the chemicals in thirdhand smoke are the same chemicals found in secondhand smoke and we do know that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. We also know that smoking in another room or near an open window does not reduce the danger of exposure. Though this area of research is new, and it will take a number of years to understand the impact of thirdhand smoke on human health, it is important to inform individuals and business owners about possible dangers of thirdhand smoke exposure.

Q. Why are smoke-free policies and practices so important?

- A. Setting smoke-free home, car and motel rules help protect the health of families, children and visitors. In Colorado about 85% of residents already have smoke-free home rules and among persons who smoke, 64% are already stepping outside their homes to smoke. Many hotels and motels have already set 100% smoke-free policies. In addition, new information emerging about thirdhand smoke exposure may lead business owners, landlords, and apartment owners to prohibit smoking to better protect the health of their cleaning and maintenance staff, especially those with asthma or respiratory conditions. Home visitors to families in subsidized housing may be more exposed to tobacco smoke pollution because lower income families often have higher levels tobacco use.

Q. What education and support is available in Colorado?

- A. See www.raisesmokefreekids.com and www.gaspforair.com for information on tobacco smoke residue. To learn about restoring an apartment or rooms go to <http://www.no-smoke.org/pdf/thirdhandsmokefactsheet.pdf>. Colorado residents can get free phone coaching for quitting smoking and free nicotine patches from the Colorado Quit Line, 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).

References

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