



Rx: Health Care FYI #40

Subject: *Reducing Exposure to Secondhand Smoke*
From: *Rep. Tim Murphy (PA-18)*

The problem: Sixty percent of nonsmokers, or 126 million people, in the United States have biologic evidence of chemical compounds, including nicotine, carbon monoxide, and tobacco-specific carcinogens, in their body from exposure to secondhand smoke. Reducing exposure to secondhand smoke will lower the 3,000 adult nonsmokers killed from lung cancer, the 46,000 nonsmokers killed from coronary heart disease and the 430 newborns killed from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) every year.¹

There is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure:

- Though tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, 44 million American adults continue to smoke tobacco products. 440,000 Americans die prematurely of a tobacco-related illness; and for every person who dies, 20 more are living with at least one serious tobacco-related illness.²
- Secondhand smoke contains more than 50 carcinogens and at least 250 toxic or carcinogenic chemicals (including formaldehyde, cyanide, carbon monoxide and ammonia) known to cause respiratory problems, cancer, heart disease, and premature births.³
- Brief secondhand smoke exposures (15 minutes) can have immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system for persons who already have heart disease.⁴
- Even sophisticated ventilation approaches cannot completely remove secondhand smoke from an indoor space.⁵

Exposure to secondhand smoke increase health care costs:

- Secondhand tobacco smoke costs the U.S. economy more than \$10 billion a year (including \$5 billion in estimated medical costs and \$4.6 billion in lost wages).⁶

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke. A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General. June 2006.

² Agwunobi, John. Remarks at press conference to launch Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General. June 27, 2006.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke. A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General. June 2006.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Society of Actuaries. Economic Effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke. 2005.

The health-effects of secondhand smoke in adults:

- Lung Cancer and Heart Disease: Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke, at home or work, increase their risk of developing lung cancer and heart disease by up to 30 percent.⁷

Secondhand smoke exposure in children is associated with:

- Low Birth Weight: Between 24,300 and 71,900 low birth weight or preterm deliveries.
- Asthma: 202,300 episodes of childhood asthma (new cases and exacerbations).
- Respiratory Illness: Up to 300,000 cases of lower respiratory illness in children.
- Ear Infections: 789,700 cases of middle ear infections in children.⁸

The federal government:

- The 1986 Surgeon General's report on *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Smoking* concluded that secondhand smoke exposure was a cause of disease in nonsmokers. It also concluded that the simple separation of smokers and nonsmokers within the same air space may reduce, but does not eliminate, secondhand smoke exposure among nonsmokers.
- The 2006 report on *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke* expands this finding by concluding that even brief secondhand smoke exposure can cause immediate harm. It also finds that eliminating smoking in indoor spaces fully protects nonsmokers from exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Medicare provides smoking cessation coverage for up to eight face-to-face visits during a 12-month period for seniors diagnosed with a smoking-related illness. There are no initial results on the effectiveness of this coverage.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has waived co-payments to entice veterans to participate in smoking cessation programs. Findings of the effectiveness of this waiver are currently under review.

Recommendations:

- Encourage smoke-free workplaces to ensure protection of employees from the negative health effects of secondhand smoke to reduce business' health care costs.
- Use reductions in health insurance premiums as incentives to reduce smoking.
- Provide health care coverage for smoking cessation programs.
- Educate the public of the health risks from exposure to secondhand smoke.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*. A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General. June 2006.

⁸ Ibid.