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Upfront

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No Amount of Secondhand Smoke is Safe, Warns Surgeon General

No amount of secondhand smoke is safe, according to a new U.S. Surgeon General's report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*, issued Tuesday, June 27, 2006. The report concluded that the only way to protect nonsmokers is through 100% smoke-free environments. Separating smokers and nonsmokers within the same air space or relying on sophisticated ventilation systems just doesn't cut it.

"Science has proven that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Let me say that again: There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke," said U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona in a prepared statement. "Only smoke-free environments effectively protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke exposure in indoor spaces."

According to the report, nonsmokers who were exposed to secondhand smoke at work or at home had a 25% to 30% increased risk of heart disease and a 20% to 30% increased risk for lung cancer.

Peter G. Billings, the American Lung Association's vice president of national policy and advocacy responded to the report: "Essentially, the Surgeon General slammed the book on any scientific debate on secondhand smoke. The evidence is clear. Secondhand smoke is harmful and needs to be eliminated."

The sweeping report, which was based on the latest research on the topic, was the first comprehensive review of secondhand smoke by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services since 1986. The 1986 report concluded that secondhand smoke causes lung cancer in nonsmokers.

According to the report, secondhand smoke, which contains more than 50 carcinogens and is a known human carcinogen, increases the risks of heart disease and lung cancer in nonsmoking adults as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), respiratory problems, ear infections, and asthma attacks in infants and children. While progress to control secondhand smoke has been made, some 126 million Americans are still exposed to it. Slightly more than 20% of children are exposed to secondhand smoke at home.

"Breathing secondhand smoke for even a short time can damage cells and set the cancer process in motion," Carmona said. "Brief exposure can have immediate harmful effects on blood and blood vessels, potentially increasing the risk of a heart attack. Secondhand smoke exposure can quickly irritate the lungs, or trigger an asthma attack. For some people, the rapid effects can be life-threatening. People who already have heart disease or respiratory conditions are at especially high risk."

Nearly half of all nonsmoking Americans are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke. In 2005, as a result of exposure to secondhand smoke, 3000 adult nonsmokers died from lung cancer, 46 000 adult nonsmokers died from coronary heart disease, and 430 newborns from SIDS

The report also found that living with a smoker increases a nonsmoker's risk of lung cancer and heart disease by up to 30%. At this point, evidence linking secondhand smoke and breast cancer is only suggestive.

"The good news is that, unlike some public health hazards, secondhand smoke exposure is preventable," said Carmona. "A proven method exists for protecting nonsmokers from the health risks associated with secondhand smoke exposure: Avoiding places where secondhand smoke is present."

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) supports a tobacco-free environment in all public places. "My personal hope is that more dental hygienists can use that policy to push for more smokefree workplaces as other states and communities work toward going smokefree. Dental hygienists are perfect advocates to push for such laws since we have daily opportunities to promote smoking cessation as a means of health promotion and disease prevention," said Diann Bomkamp, RDH, BSDH, CDHC, vice president of ADHA, and a participant in Tobacco-Free Missouri, a group working to promote a smokefree environment in Missouri.

"Being a dental hygienist advocate has four benefits: promoting us as knowledgeable health professionals; being involved with coalition building with other likeminded groups; promoting better health policies; and getting our oral health messages to the public. Dental hygienists can do them all effectively!" said Bomkamp.

The Surgeon General recommends the following tips on protecting yourself, friends, and family from the effects of secondhand smoke:

- Make your home and car smoke-free.
- Ask people not to smoke around you or your children.
- Make sure that your children's daycare center or school is smoke-free
- Patronize restaurants and other businesses that are smoke-free.
- Teach children to stay away from secondhand smoke.
- Avoid secondhand smoke exposure especially if you or your children have respiratory conditions, if you have heart disease, or if you are pregnant.

U.S. Women are in the Dark about Lung Cancer

A new survey published by the U.S. National Lung Cancer Partnership (NLCP) revealed that American women are greatly uninformed about lung cancer and how it can affect them. The 2006 survey of more than 500 women discloses not only the statistical realities of lung cancer in this county but also the widespread lack of awareness by millions.

"This survey is a current snapshot of women's attitudes and beliefs about lung cancer, and it's frightening-especially considering the extensive media coverage on the topic after Peter Jennings' and Dana Reeve's deaths," said Regina Vidaver, executive director of the NLCP. "Women need to know the truth about lung cancer."

Lung cancer affects more than 80 000 American women annually, with over 70 000 cases resulting in death. Although breast cancer is often thought of as the leading cause of death among women, 30 000 more women die annually from lung cancer than from breast cancer. In fact, lung cancer claims the lives of more women than breast, uterine, and ovarian cancers combined. Vital findings from the survey include:

- Only 41% of women know that lung cancer is the leading cancer killer in the United States
- Only 8% of women understand that exposure to radon gas is the second leading cause of lung cancer. Instead, 60% of women share the mistaken belief that exposure to secondhand smoke is the number two cause (the number one cause being smoking).
- Only 36% of women are aware that lung cancer kills more women than breast cancer.
- Only 29% of women know that lung cancer kills more women than breast, ovarian, and uterine cancers combined.
- Only 41% of women know that one in every 17 women will develop a lung malignancy in her lifetime.

- Only 18% of women know that women make up the majority of young-under the age of 40-lung cancer patients.
- Only 4% of women know that women typically do better than men following lung cancer treatment.

Why are so many women dying from this disease? According to the NLCP, 25% of women "mistakenly believe there is a standard screening test to detect lung cancer in its early stages. Although such tests are in development, there is no clinically-approved screening test of this nation's top cancer killer."

"Lung cancer is often perceived as a man's disease, yet it affects tens of thousands of women, and we're very concerned that women seem to be in the dark when it comes to the facts about lung cancer and the significant impact lung cancer can have on their lives," said Dr. Joan Schiller, president of NLCP.

For more information, please visit <http://www.4woman.gov/faq/lung.htm>, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health Web site on women and lung cancer.