

How long do the harmful elements of secondhand smoke linger?

There has been no determination of how long the harmful effects of secondhand smoke lingers in the air. Depending on a room's ventilation, the smell of tobacco smoke can linger for some time.

Smoking outdoors is not much better. The only difference is that the concentration of the harmful chemicals, compounds and particles is kept inside when smoking indoors, and does not go away as quickly as when smoking outdoors.

If tobacco smoke is in the air, it can and does present potential health problems to all, but particularly children.

Regardless of where the exposure takes place – outside or inside – secondhand smoke poses health risks to children. The U.S. Surgeon General has found there is no safe level of exposure. Environmental tobacco smoke can cause:

- Bronchitis
- Pneumonia
- Wheezing
- Coughing spells
- Inner ear infections
- Decreased lung function
- More frequent and severe asthma attacks
- Increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

If secondhand smoke or the smell of secondhand smoke is not currently in the air but has been allowed to pass through clothing and furnishings, the odor may still be present and irritating.

Exposure to secondhand smoke or its contaminants can cause or exacerbate (make worse) a wide range of adverse health effects, including cancer, respiratory infections and asthma.

Resources

- American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org
- American Lung Association: www.lung.org
- Smokefree.gov: www.smokefree.gov

Some content on this page was gathered from the United States Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov.

Additional content was gathered from documents found on the website for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services: www.cdc.gov.

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