



Why is second-hand smoke more dangerous in cars?

Breathing in [second-hand smoke](#) anywhere is harmful to everyone's health. However, breathing in second-hand smoke inside a car is even more dangerous.

Why? Tobacco smoke is a dangerous mix of more than 4,000 dangerous chemical and carcinogens. Because the space inside cars is confined, second-hand smoke is more concentrated. The poisons found in smoke can reach very high levels in a short amount of time.

In fact, breathing in smoke from a single cigarette for only five minutes in a car can expose you to the same amount of smoke as being in a smoky bar for the same amount of time.

You may think that cracking open a window helps. But it doesn't – that smoke often just gets blown back into the car and can linger for hours. Smoke clings to the upholstery in your car, exposing passengers to its toxic chemicals even when the smoker has stopped puffing.

According to a 2006 Health Canada survey, 25 per cent of Canadians say they were exposed to second-hand smoke in a car or vehicle in the past month.

Why is breathing in second-hand smoke in a car more dangerous for children than adults?

Babies and children are more at risk of getting sick than adults when they breathe in second-hand smoke because their bodies are still growing. They are especially vulnerable because they breathe more quickly and take in more harmful chemicals for their size than adults. Second-hand smoke affects their developing respiratory, immune and nervous systems.

Unlike adults, babies and children don't have much choice in leaving a smoky car by themselves and finding another way to get around. They must stay with their parents or caregivers and are less able to complain than adults about being around second-hand smoke in a car.

Research shows that children exposed to second-hand smoke are at higher risk for many health problems. A 2006 report on the consequences of second-hand smoke on children by the U.S. Surgeon General found that children exposed to second-hand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), acute respiratory infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia, middle ear disease, more severe asthma, respiratory symptoms, and slowed lung growth.