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<th>Title</th>
<th>Passive smoking: secondhand smoke does cause respiratory disease.</th>
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In the 1950s and 1960s, the rate of smoking among women was rising, and it is estimated that by 1970, half of all women in the United States were smoking. This rise coincided with increased exposure to secondhand smoke, as more women entered the workforce and had greater exposure to smoke in public spaces.

Secondhand smoke can cause respiratory disease

Secondhand smoke can cause respiratory disease among children and adults. Studies have shown that exposure to secondhand smoke can cause respiratory problems, including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and bronchitis. Children who are exposed to secondhand smoke have a higher risk of developing asthma and COPD than those who are not exposed.

Competing interests: None declared.


Secondhand smoke does cause respiratory disease

Editor—The report by Enstrom and Kabat confirms that exposure to secondhand smoke causes injury to the respiratory system with a finding of a combined increased mortality risk for men and women for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (relative risk 1.65, 95% confidence interval 1.0 to 2.73). This is consistent with other investigations that show the sensitivity of the respiratory system to secondhand smoke at all ages and in different settings. In Hong Kong several studies have shown that the exposure of infants to secondhand smoke in utero or postnatally in the home was linked to higher consultation rates and hospitalisation for respiratory and other illnesses.1 Smoking in the home was clearly associated with bronchitic symptoms in a cohort of primary school children, independently of ambient air pollution.2 In an adult workforce, workplace exposures to passive smoking were associated with significant excess risks (66% to 212%) for all respiratory symptoms and increased healthcare costs.3 In a population survey the prevalence of secondhand smoke exposures at work was 47.5% among non-smoking full time workers compared with only 26% at home. People exposed at work were 37% more likely to consult a doctor for respiratory illness.4 The increased health costs due to secondhand smoke exposure in Hong Kong were £155 million annually.5

In other words, we have epidemics of respiratory disease in Hong Kong caused by secondhand smoke. However, because of the way in which the Enstrom and Kabat paper was presented or the attention that will be paid in media reports to the findings on mortality risks from respiratory disease.

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