



## Children's Environmental Health Disparities: **Hispanic and Latino American Children** and Secondhand Smoke

This fact sheet focuses on disparities in exposure to secondhand smoke for Hispanic children. This fact sheet also provides important actions that can be taken to protect all children.

Pollution in the environment may harm children more than adults. This is because children's bodies are still growing. Also, they eat more, drink more, and breathe more in proportion to their body size than adults. And children's normal behavior can expose them more to pollution. This means that exposure to a given amount of pollution results in a larger quantity of the pollutant in children's bodies compared to adults.

Children of racial and ethnic minorities and poor children may be exposed to more pollution.<sup>93</sup> Thus, they may face the biggest health risks from pollution. This fact sheet describes Hispanic children's health risks related to secondhand smoke. It tells you how you can take actions to protect all children.

### What is Secondhand Smoke?

Secondhand smoke, or environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), is a mix of smoke from the burning end of a cigarette, pipe, or cigar and smoke exhaled by smokers. It contains more

than 4,000 chemicals, many of which cause cancer.<sup>24</sup> Secondhand smoke is especially bad for children because their bodies are developing, and because they breathe at higher rates than adults do.

Secondhand smoke is a major trigger for asthma.<sup>94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99</sup> Studies have linked secondhand smoke to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), bronchitis, pneumonia, and ear infections.<sup>100, 101, 102</sup> Each year the US spends more than \$700 million on children's medical costs due to secondhand smoke.<sup>90</sup> Children born to women exposed to ETS while pregnant have shown signs of delayed development in speech and language, learning, and memory.<sup>25, 26</sup>

Smoking in the home is a key source of ETS. Kids spend most of their time at home and indoors. A national survey found that almost 3 million children (11%) aged 6 and under are exposed to ETS at home four or more days per week.<sup>27</sup> This survey also found that exposure to secondhand smoke was higher in

households with low income and educational levels.

Older children are also at risk from exposure at home and school. Twenty-two percent of middle school students and 24% of high school students are exposed to secondhand smoke in the home.<sup>91</sup>

Hispanics have lower rates of smoking than other racial or ethnic groups. For example, fewer Hispanics smoke on a daily basis (11%) compared with Whites (16%), Blacks (14%), and other races (14%).<sup>71</sup> This suggests that Hispanic children may have lower secondhand smoke exposure.

However, smoking rates differ among Hispanic groups. For example, Puerto Rican and Cuban-American women have higher rates of heavy-smoking (more than ½ pack per day) than Mexican-American women (49% compared to 19%).<sup>92</sup>

Also, the longer a foreign born Hispanic person lives in the US,

## Secondhand Smoke



the more likely he or she will start smoking. For example, 95% of Mexican-born mothers ban smoking in their homes, compared with 78% of US-born Hispanic mothers.<sup>67, 68, 69</sup> So smoking may become a more serious problem for Hispanics and increase their children's exposure to secondhand smoke, the longer they live in the US.

Overall, exposure to secondhand smoke declined during the 1990s. Education campaigns about the dangers of smoking and secondhand smoke may have played a role in the decline.<sup>29</sup> Many of these efforts now target teens and parents of children with asthma. While smoking rates are generally lower among Hispanics, efforts need to be directed at keeping those rates low to protect children.

### **What Can You Do?**

If you smoke, don't smoke in your home and car. Don't allow family and

visitors to do so, either. Moving to another room or opening a window is not enough to protect your children. Smoke outside until you can quit, away from children, and away from doors and windows to prevent the smoke from entering the home.

Don't smoke if you are pregnant or near someone who is pregnant.

Take the EPA Smoke-Free Home Pledge: Call 1-866-SMOKE-FREE (1-866-766-5337) or visit: <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/ets/pledge/index.html>.

For more information on how to protect kids from ETS, visit <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/ets/>.

### **What's Being Done?**

Here are some examples of efforts by Federal governmental agencies, local and national organizations to address secondhand smoke.

EPA's Smoke-Free Homes Program website can help you keep your home smoke-free. It offers bilingual brochures explaining the dangers of secondhand smoke that you can download. To learn more, visit <http://www.epa.gov/smokefree/>.

The Ad Council and EPA work together on the National Childhood Asthma Public Service Campaign. The Campaign raises awareness about secondhand smoke and other asthma triggers. It also provides tips for parents about simple steps they can take to help their child. To view the radio and TV campaign materials, available in English and Spanish, visit [www.noattacks.org](http://www.noattacks.org).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a bilingual Tobacco Information and Prevention Source (TIPS) website. TIPS describes the health hazards of smoking. It features a *Tips 4 Youth* section, where kids can test their knowledge. It also has fact sheets and posters for anti-smoking campaigns. The site describes community action plans and state anti-tobacco programs. For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/index.htm>.

Healthy and asthma-friendly schools are free of tobacco. CDC offers an easy-to-use self-assessment and planning tool for schools to improve their health and safety programs. To access this tool, visit <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/SHI/Default.aspx>.

Many workplaces and other facilities are now smoke-free. The American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation tracks tobacco control regulations in a database. It publishes maps and lists of smoke-free cities, states, universities, hotels, airports, restaurants, and other venues. To learn more, visit <http://www.no-smoke.org/goingsmokefree.php?id=519>.

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## **RESOURCES:**

For more information on children's environmental health, visit the EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection and Environmental Education at <http://yosemite.epa.gov/ochp/ochpweb.nsf/content/homepage.htm>. You can also call the office at (202) 564-2188.

- America's Children and the Environment data/indicators, <http://www.epa.gov/envirohealth/children/index.htm>
- Office of Minority Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/>
- Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units, [www.aoc.org/PEHSU.htm](http://www.aoc.org/PEHSU.htm) or call toll free 1-888-347-2632

- National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, National Institutes of Health, <http://ncmhd.nih.gov/>
- National Alliance for Hispanic Health, <http://www.hispanichealth.org/>
- National Council of La Raza, <http://www.nclr.org/>
- Kaiser Family Foundation Health Disparities Report: A Weekly Look at Race, Ethnicity and Health/ [http://kaisernet.org/daily\\_reports/rep\\_disparities.cfm](http://kaisernet.org/daily_reports/rep_disparities.cfm)
- DiversityData, Harvard School of Public Health website on indicators of how people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds live includes comparative data about housing, neighborhood conditions, residential integration, and education, [www.DiversityData.org](http://www.DiversityData.org)

- Unnatural Causes, a TV documentary series and public outreach campaign on the causes of socioeconomic racial/ethnic inequities in health, <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>