

Tobacco Podcasts: Protecting Families from Smoke in Homes and Cars: You Have the Power

April Williams: National Center on Health podcast titled, "Protecting Families From Smoke in Homes and Cars: YOU Have the Power!" My name is April Williams and I'm the program coordinator for the Head Start National Center on Health. I'd now like to introduce our speaker, Dr. Jonathan Winickoff. Dr. Winickoff is a practicing pediatrician at the Massachusetts General Hospital, an associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School. He has training and experience in health services research, medical ethics, neurobiology, statistics, and behavioral therapy. He has backed the key tobacco control policy and served as a scientific advisor for the CDC Communities Putting Prevention to Work, the Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program, Indiana Tobacco Control Program, Head Start, WIC, the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Institute of Medicine, and the U.S. Surgeon General through the Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health. And now I'll turn it over to you, Dr. Winickoff.

Dr. Jonathan Winickoff: Thank you April, and welcome everybody. In this webcast we are going to focus on three things: understanding the child health risks associated with tobacco smoke exposure, including thirdhand smoke, what does it mean to have a completely smoke free home and car, and provide tips for helping families create and maintain smoke-free home and car rules. Creating and maintaining a smoke-free home and car is one of the best things parents and caregivers can do to help the children they love stay healthy.

To get us started, we're going to quickly go over some information about secondhand smoke and thirdhand smoke. Most people are familiar with the term "secondhand smoke" and can describe what it means. Secondhand smoke is the smoke exhaled from smoking, plus the smoke that comes from the burning tip of a cigarette. Most parents have known for a long time now that secondhand smoke is harmful. In fact, people who are exposed to high levels of secondhand smoke can have the same health problems and consequences as people who smoke. The Surgeon General has said that there is no safe level of tobacco smoke exposure, and secondhand smoke causes 50,000 deaths each year.

The term "thirdhand smoke" was first published in 2009. It refers to leftover contamination after the cigarette is extinguished, in the air, in a car, on clothing, on home fabrics such as carpet, curtains, and sofa covers, and on surfaces such as tables, bookshelves, and walls. It is the residue and contamination that stays on surfaces and in the air long after a smoker leaves a room or a car. Homes and cars in which people have smoked may smell of cigarettes for long periods of time. That's thirdhand smoke.

If you've ever lived in an apartment or house where someone used to smoke, you probably know that even new paint and carpet doesn't totally eliminate the smell. Thirdhand smoke has been featured extensively in the media. I'm going to play you a clip of a recent Today Show episode.

Matt Lauer: We're back at 7:43 this morning on Today's Health, the dangers of thirdhand smoke. We've always known that secondhand smoke is bad for you, but new research in this month's Pediatrics Journal tells you about something you may not know about: thirdhand smoke. Dr. Nancy Snyderman is NBC's chief medical editor.

Hi, Nancy. Good morning.

Dr. Nancy Snyderman: Hi Matt.

Matt Lauer: What is it? What is thirdhand smoke?

Dr. Snyderman: Thirdhand smoke is a new term coined by the authors who published this report in Pediatrics. It's basically the stuff that lingers in the air, on your carpet, on the floor, the toxins that come out of cigarettes that just don't go away.

Matt Lauer: Let me give you the nasty list here. Among things like butane, arsenic, lead, carbon monoxide. How long do these last?

Dr. Snyderman: Cadmium.

Matt Lauer: Yeah. How long do these last in carpets and sofas and drapes?

Dr. Snyderman: They can last for a long time. And here's the problem: An infant crawling around your floor takes in twice as much dust as you do as an adult. So we know that this stuff is neurotoxic and damages your brain, and we know it can be related to learning disorders and all kinds of problems. So what we did find in this report was not only does this stuff linger and it's toxic, but that the attitudes about whether it really exists and does it cause problems different significantly between smokers and non-smokers.

Matt Lauer: Researchers found 95 percent of non-smokers and 84 percent of all smokers agreed that inhaling smoke from a patient or parent cigarette can harm the health of infants.

Dr. Snyderman: The classic secondhand smoke.

Matt Lauer: Only 65 percent of non-smokers and 43 percent of smokers thought that breathing air in the room after the cigarette is extinguished could be harmful.

Dr. Snyderman: Right, so we know that secondhand smoke kills 50,000 people a year. Here's what we don't or haven't really paid attention to: the stuff that lingers on a smoker's sweater, on the sofa, on the floor, that stuff slowly gets absorbed. And I'll tell you, I had a former smoker in my family, one of my siblings who no longer smokes. He hugged his daughter one night, she got an asthma attack. It was that asthma attack that made him stop smoking.

Matt Lauer: There's people sitting at home right now saying, "Well you can't see this stuff," but this is the stuff your nose alerts you to. A lot of times you walk in a room, you think it smells like someone smoking in here, that's a good clue. Your nose is telling you there's danger in that room.

Dr. Snyderman: Everybody's been on an elevator and a smoker gets on and you can tell immediately who that smoker is because you smell those toxins. This is the same stuff that comes out of exhaust pipe of a city bus.

Matt Lauer: Is there any way to protect -- if you're a parent, real quickly -- what can you do?

Dr. Snyderman: First of all, if you really can't kick the habit, you have to smoke outside. And then I would say guess what -- you have to change your clothes. They have to go right into the washing machine. Because you really are a walking toxic dump if you just smoked a cigarette.

Matt Lauer: Non-smoking hotel rooms, boy I tell you they're popular, and they're going to be more popular than ever after this.

Dr. Snyderman: They are. You really have to create a non-smoking environment for your child if you really want to have a safe child.

Matt Lauer: Nancy, thank you very much. Happy New Year. Good to see you.

Dr. Winickoff: So for the Head Start community, there is no safe level of smoking during pregnancy and infancy. Quitting smoking is the most important thing a mother can do to help her baby develop and grow in a healthy way. When a woman quits smoking during pregnancy, her chances of having an uncomplicated pregnancy and a healthy baby are dramatically increased. Smoking while pregnant lowers the amount of oxygen the fetus receives and is harmful to the placenta, which is the source of nutrition and oxygen for the fetus.

Smoking increases pregnancy risks for women who smoke, including ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, and still birth. Children whose mother smoked during their pregnancy are at increased risk for behavioral problems, including attention problems, learning disorders, and becoming smokers themselves. Children who live in homes or spend time in cars where they're exposed to smoke are at increased risk for many health problems.

Children exposed to tobacco smoke have higher risk in rates of asthma, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, pneumonia and bronchiolitis, ear infections, dental caries, cavities, developmental delay, Attention-Deficit Disorder, and behavior problems. Children rely on the adults in their lives to keep them healthy and safe. They do not have the skills or the knowledge to be their own health advocate, and they cannot move out or find another ride to reduce their exposure to smoke.

Tobacco smoke exposure has an impact on school readiness. Children who are exposed to tobacco smoke are more likely to miss school and have trouble with foundation subjects such as math and reading. Poor health in the classroom interferes with the ability to learn. It's hard for someone who is unhealthy and not feeling well to concentrate and do well in a structured school setting. In addition, parents who smoke are more likely to have health problems, and parent health has a huge impact on a child's school attendance and readiness.

Creating and maintaining smoke-free homes and cars is one of the best things a parent can do to help their child be healthy, ready to learn, and ready for kindergarten. As part of the Head Start Family Smoking Survey, which is introduced in another webcast called, "How to Use the Head Start Family Smoking Survey," we ask families to share whether anyone ever smokes in their home or car. We know that in some homes, the people who live there do not smoke but family and friends may be allowed to smoke when they come over or ride in the family car. All tobacco smoke, whether it's every day or not, can impact a child's health and wellbeing.

As we said before, children rely on the adults in their lives to keep them healthy and safe. They do not have the skills or the knowledge to be their own health advocate. And they cannot move out or find another ride to reduce their exposure to smoke. Setting and enforcing a smoke-free home and car rule is a great place for families to start with creating safe, healthy places for their children to live, learn, play, and grow.

Having a smoke-free home means that nobody ever smokes inside the home for any reason. Places where smoking should never be permitted include a garage, a basement, with the window open, even with the window open, a bathroom even if there's a fan on, outdoor spaces next to doors and windows, such as a balcony or patio. Even when no children are present, it is not safe to smoke because of thirdhand smoke.

Having a smoke-free car means that nobody ever smokes in the car for any reason. This includes no smoking while driving with the windows open, no smoking while driving with the air conditioning on, and no smoking even when no children are in the car. In this program, the concept of perceived behavioral control means that the parent has the power to protect their child from tobacco smoke exposure.

Sometimes the person completing the survey does not have the power to create and enforce a smoke-free home and car rule, even if they want to. A note from the child's pediatrician or even from the Head Start program can help motivate or encourage adults who smoke to set a smoke-free home and car rule. Make sure you support parents who want to do the right thing to protect their children. You can use the action plan template to help families set and achieve smoke-free home and car rules for themselves.

It's important to remember and to remind parents that having a smoke-free home and car rule is not necessarily the same as quitting or giving up smoking. A smoke-free home and car is about making sure children have safe, healthy places to live, learn, play, and grow. In the family action plan, you'll notice the first section, which is goals.

What are we trying to accomplish? So there you might say, "Every child in our program will live in homes and ride in cars that are 100 percent smoke-free all of the time." The target audience might be parents and other caregivers. And the timeframe you could say, "By the end of this program year." And in terms of steps, you have a first task, which is identifying the children who are exposed to tobacco smoke at home or in the family car, and you want to make sure who will make it happen. Who will make sure that that screening takes place? And that's the program staff. When will we complete this task? An example might be, "As the Family Smoking Surveys are completed."

And what resources will we need and who will help us? A completed Family Smoking Survey from each family can help guide the messaging for each family to make a completely smoke-free home and car. Then it's important to follow up with parents to make sure that they followed through on their commitment for smoke-free homes and cars. And lastly, help all parents set that permanent rule for no smoking in the home and car. If a parent is interested in quitting smoking, having a smoke-free home and car can be a great first step toward that goal.

We will discuss how Head Start staff can help parents move towards a smoke-free life in another webcast called, "Connecting Families to Free Quit Resources." If you have any questions about the information we shared during this webcast, please call the National Center on Health toll-free at 888-227-5125. You can also contact us by email at nchinfo@aap.org.

We wish you all the best as you take this important step to help the children and families in your program. Thank you for your commitment to creating safe, healthy environments for children to live, learn, and play.