



Health Effects of Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke: Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 10

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute

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Exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) has been linked to a variety of adverse health outcomes. Many Californians are exposed at home, at work, and in public places. In the comprehensive reviews published as Reports of the Surgeon General and by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the National Research Council (NRC), ETS exposure has been found to be causally associated with respiratory illnesses—including lung cancer, childhood asthma, and lower respiratory tract infections. Scientific knowledge about ETS-related effects has expanded considerably since the release of the above-mentioned reviews. The state of California has therefore undertaken a broad review of ETS covering the major health endpoints potentially associated with ETS exposure: perinatal and postnatal manifestations of developmental toxicity, adverse impacts on male and female reproduction, respiratory disease, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. A “weight of evidence” approach has been used, in which the body of evidence is examined to determine whether or not it can be concluded that ETS exposure is causally associated with a particular effect. Because the epidemiological data are extensive, they serve as the primary basis for assessment of ETS-related effects in humans. The report also presents an overview on measurements of ETS exposure (particularly as they relate to characterizations of exposure in epidemiological investigations) and on the prevalence of ETS exposure in California and nationally. ETS, or “secondhand smoke,” is the complex mixture formed from the escaping smoke of a burning tobacco product and smoke exhaled by the smoker. The characteristics of ETS change as it ages and combines with other constituents in the ambient air. Exposure to ETS is also frequently referred to as “passive smoking,” or “involuntary tobacco smoke” exposure. Although all exposures of the fetus are “passive” and “involuntary,” for the purposes of this review, in utero exposure resulting from maternal smoking during pregnancy is not considered to be ETS exposure.

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