

health

Cigarette smoke and children are not meant to share a space. Yet, over 700 million children worldwide are exposed to cigarette smoke, with most of the exposure occurring at home, estimates the World Health Organisation. A research presented at the Asia Pacific Conference on Tobacco or Health in Sydney this October found that children exposed to tobacco smoke in their

homes suffer higher rates of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, stuttering and headaches. They're more prone to have learning difficulties, developmental delays, low immunity, respiratory infections (including bronchitis and pneumonia), tooth decay, nausea, ear infections and asthma. And, they have a three to four-fold higher risk of heart attack in their 40s or 50s.

Cigarette-proof your kids

One smoker can jeopardise the entire family's health. While it's best to kick the habit, these steps can go

a long way in protecting children. ■ It's a myth that non-smoking sections in restaurants are safe areas. These usually share common spaces with the smoking section, so the same air gets circulated. Even well-ventilated non-smoking areas contain at least half the amount of smoke found in adjacent smoking areas. Opt for non-smoking restaurants or where the smoking section is on a different floor (not just with the staircase going up from the smoking section). ■ Your home and car are the bigger danger zones simply because more

time is spent there. The Global Adult Tobacco Survey, released in October, found that 52 per cent Indians are exposed to passive smoking at home. Work on these zones. ■ Smoking inside the house is an absolute no. There are 69 carcinogens in tobacco smoke and these remain in the air for hours, especially in enclosed spaces. So you can't smoke and then air out the room. Nor can you say that you only smoke when your children are not in the house. Dust particles, surfaces and furnishings in the homes of smokers are contaminated with toxins which get inhaled and ingested.

■ Make sure you don't keep ashtrays inside the house, unless they are cleaned with an antiseptic. And don't leave cigarette butts in dustbins. ■ Designate separate smoking areas — an out-of-the-way balcony or a separate study. And don't use the common bathroom. Install exhausts everywhere in the house so that air circulates properly. ■ Keep away for children for at least an hour after a smoke. Remember, children — especially infants and toddlers — are exposed to smoke residues that stick to the clothes, skin and hair of the smoker. Ideally, change your clothes and wash up after a cigarette. ■ Always brush your teeth or use a

mouthwash after a smoke because cigarette smell can be addictive and over time, the child might start getting cravings.

■ Never hug or kiss your child after you have smoked. Researchers in Australia have found that children exposed to passive smoking are four times more likely to contract meningococcal disease (brain fever). Prof Robert Booy, director of research, National Centre for Immunisation and Research at The Children's Hospital (Sydney), believes that smokers are prime carriers of the deadly meningococcus bacteria in the back of their throats.

■ Make cars smoke-free if there are children travelling. The smoke does not escape when you keep the window rolled down. In fact, smoking in a car can be 23 times more toxic than in a house. ■

Kick the habit

A study published in the journal *Addiction* (2003) by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle said that children of parents who quit smoking before the child entered the third grade were 39 per cent less likely to become smokers at age 17 or 18 than children of those who didn't.

(Experts inputs by Dr. Hemant Tiwari, senior consultant in Pulmonology, Fortis Hospital, Vasant Kunj and Escorts Hospital; Dr Rajiv Chhabra, consultant paediatric and neonatal intensivist, Artemis Health Institute, Gurgaon)

Don't make them live in smoke



Every cigarette you puff can wreak havoc on your kid's health. Kavita Devgan offers some safety tips



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