

THIRDHAND SMOKE Resource Center

How can I minimize my child's exposure to thirdhand smoke?

Babies and young children are at greatest risk of exposure to thirdhand smoke. Here are some simple steps you can take to minimize exposure:

Make sure all of your child's indoor environments are 100% smokefree.

- That means no smoking tobacco cigarettes, pipes, cigars, electronic cigarettes, or marijuana at any time inside your home or anywhere else your child spends time. "Anywhere else" includes homes of friends and family, hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues, and playgrounds.
- Remember that smoke can drift into your home, so don't allow anyone to smoke outside near doors, windows, or ventilation systems.
- When you are renting an apartment or buying a new home, ask questions about tobacco, e-cigarette, and marijuana use by previous residents. Include what you learn in your overall decision process.

Make sure your child travels in 100% smokefree cars.

- Don't allow any smoking in your own car at any time, and don't let your child ride with anyone who does allow smoking in their car.
- If you are buying a used car, be sure to ask about smoking by previous owners. Thirdhand smoke is nearly impossible to remove from automobiles.

Make sure adults who spend time with your child are 100% smokefree, especially childcare workers.

- Ask anyone who smokes to wash their hands, shower, change, and/or wash their clothes before coming in contact with your child.

Don't bring thirdhand smoke into your home.

- Before buying something used such as furniture or clothing, ask about tobacco, e-cigarette, and marijuana use by previous owners. If you can't find out, factor that into your decision to purchase.
- If you have items that came from a smoker's home, especially clothes, toys, rugs, or blankets, thoroughly wash or consider discarding them.
- People who smoke can carry tobacco residue into your home on their skin, hair, and clothes, even if they always smoke outside. Encourage them to shower and change into clean clothes when coming inside after smoking.
- You may be able to reduce thirdhand smoke in your home by (1) opening windows to air out rooms each week, (2) regularly wiping surfaces with a diluted white vinegar solution, (3) frequent dusting, and (4) weekly vacuuming with a HEPA filter.

Sources

Kassem NO, Daffa RM, Liles S, Jackson SR, Kassem NO, Younis MA, Mehta S, Chen M, Jacob P 3rd, Carmella SG, Chatfield DA, Benowitz NL, Matt GE, Hecht SS, Hovell MF. Children's exposure to secondhand and thirdhand smoke carcinogens and toxicants in homes of hookah smokers. *Nicotine Tob Res.* 2014 Jul;16(7):961-75. doi: 10.1093/ntr/ntu016. Epub 2014 Mar 3.

Mahabee-Gittens EM, Merianos AL, Hoh E, Quintana PJE, Matt GE. Nicotine on children's hands: limited protection of smoking bans and initial clinical findings. *Tob Use Insights.* 2019;12:1-6. PMID: 30728727; PMCID: PMC6351963.

Matt GE, Quintana PJ, Hovell MF, Bernert JT, Song S, Novianti N, Juarez T, Floro J, Gehrman C, Garcia M, Larson S. Households contaminated by environmental tobacco smoke: sources of infant exposures. *Tob Control.* 2004 Mar;13(1):29-37. PubMed PMID:14985592.

Northrup TF, Matt GE, Hovell MF, Khan AM, Stotts AL. (2015). Thirdhand smoke in the homes of medically fragile children: Assessing the impact of indoor smoking levels and smoking bans. *Nicotine Tob Res.* 2016;18(5):1290-8. Epub: 2015 Aug 26. doi:10.1093/ntr/ntv174. PubMed PMID:26315474.

Updated: March 2020

