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Experts warn of the dangers of "thirdhand" smoke

Dust from cigarettes is especially harmful to kids, researchers say

—Deborah L. Shelton

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We've all heard about the health risks of secondhand smoke. But thirdhand smoke?

Medical experts say there is such a thing, and it's particularly hazardous for children.

Thirdhand smoke isn't smoke in the traditional sense. It's defined as the residual contamination from tobacco smoke that remains after a cigarette is extinguished—toxic dust that settles onto surfaces and harmful volatile compounds that disperse in the air.

A recent study in the journal *Pediatrics* notes: "Children are especially susceptible to thirdhand smoke exposure because they breathe near, crawl and play on, touch and mouth contaminated surfaces."

Researchers found that adults who believed thirdhand smoke harmed children's health were more likely to institute household smoking bans.

Some parents put a no-smoking rule in the same category as the decision not to use chemicals on lawns where kids play, said Joel Africk, president and CEO of the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

"We see this as the right and authority of the family to decide that they are not going to allow those carcinogens in the house," said Africk, who was not involved in the study.

Africk emphasized that the *Pediatrics* study did not call for legislation that would ban smoking in private homes.

Instead, he said: "We think this is a reminder to parents—smokers and non-smokers alike—that if they allow smoking in the home, it's going to hurt their children."

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