

More ear infections in teens with smoker at home

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Family members who smoke are more apt to feel it is OK to smoke indoors as their children get older. But in households with secondhand smoke, children between 12 and 17 are 1.67 times more prone to have recurrent ear infections compared to adolescents who live in a smoke-free environment, a large new study reveals.

Harvard researchers analyzed smoking behavior of 90,961 families surveyed between April 2007 and July 2008.

“Overall, we found that the proportion of [households](#) that use tobacco products is the same across all age groups, but family members are increasingly more likely to smoke indoors as their [children](#) become preteens and teenagers,” said Summer Hawkins Ph.D., lead study author.

“The reason why secondhand smoke may cause [ear infections](#) is not known completely, but secondhand smoke is an irritant and that may increase children’s and [adolescents](#)’ susceptibility to ear infections.”

Their findings appear online in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

“Parents are usually pretty savvy and know it’s not in their children’s best interest to smoke indoors,” said Ellen Wald, M.D., chair of pediatrics for American Family Children’s Hospital in Madison, Wis. “When they say they never smoke indoors, I’m skeptical. They know that’s the answer people want to hear.”

The study authors suggest that pediatricians should do more to make parents aware of the hazards of secondhand smoke.

“Parents and health care providers need to work together to create a smoke-free environment for their children,” Hawkins said. “Providers should ask parents about tobacco use during clinic visits. Parents can reduce children’s exposure to secondhand by prohibiting smoke inside the home.”

While no simple answer exists, Wald said, “In order to change behavior you have to talk about it. Physicians are in a good position to send the message that everyone’s vulnerable to [secondhand smoke](#), not just children and adolescents but adults as well.”

More information: Hawkins SS, Berkman L. Increased tobacco exposure in older children and the impact on asthma and ear infections. *J Adol Health* online 2010. www.jahonline.org/

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