

Six out of ten children whose parents restrict smoking to the porch or the yard still at risk from tobacco smoke

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Many parents think that they are protecting their children by smoking on the porch or next to the window in a room. However, a new study by Tel

Aviv University finds that, in contrast to such beliefs, restricting smoking to the porch does not protect most children from exposure to tobacco smoke.

In a unique Israeli study, the research team tested for the presence of nicotine in the hair of children whose parents smoke. Among parents who restrict smoking to the porch or outside the house, the findings are extremely worrisome: among six out of 10 children tested, nicotine was found in their hair.

The researchers emphasize, "In Israel, home porches should be regarded as part of the environment of the home. Smoking next to a window or in another specific place in the home does not protect most children from exposure. Our recommendations are unequivocal: to reduce children's exposure to [tobacco](#) smoke, smoking should be entirely avoided within a range of 10 meters from the house. Likewise, in open areas, smokers should maintain a distance of at least 10 meters from the children."

The study was led by Prof. Leah (Laura) Rosen from the School of Public Health in the Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel Aviv University. The study was published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

In the study, the team tested children's level of [tobacco smoke exposure](#) by testing hair samples of children for the presence of nicotine. This provides an estimate of the amount of exposure to tobacco smoke over the past months. Analysis of the data showed that among smoking families who restricted smoking to the porch or outdoors, and did not smoke inside the house, 62% of the children were exposed to tobacco smoke.

It was noted that in the first stage of the study (which was published about two years ago), the research team tested for the presence of hair

nicotine among children of smoking parents—and then it was found that 70% of the children of smoking parents had measurable hair nicotine. Now, as described above, the researchers examined the data by location of parental smoking.

Prof. Rosen stated, "It is known that smoking outside the house, even when the doors and windows are fully closed, does not completely protect children from exposure to tobacco smoke. The Israeli situation is of great concern because in many cases, porches in Israel are directly adjacent to the living areas and may even be partially open some of the time; the proximity allows smoke to drift from those areas to the interior of the house. The parents mistakenly believe that the porch offers a 'safe' place to smoke.

"In fact, the children are likely to be directly exposed when they come out to the porch and someone is smoking, or when smoke drifts into the house. Once in the home, the smoke is absorbed into the environment, for example, into the furniture or walls or rugs, and is then gradually discharged into the air over weeks or months. Further, this residual smoke, known as third hand smoke, can be absorbed into the body from the environment via swallowing or through the skin, especially among infants and small children.

"In addition, smoking parents transmit the toxins from the tobacco smoke on their skin, on their hands, in their hair, on their clothing. Therefore it is recommended to brush teeth, wash hands and change clothes after smoking, before contact with children."

Prof. Rosen notes that this new information is directly relevant to Case 1416/21 on neighbor smoking, which is currently being heard in the Supreme Court. The appeal against the Ministries of the Environment, Health, and Interior concerns the tobacco smoke that penetrates apartments as an environmental hazard, a claim that is supported by the

definition of an environmental hazard in the Clean Air Law, the Hazard Prevention Law, and the Penal Code.

Prof. Rosen said, "The results of this study show that among smoking families, restricting smoking to the porch does not protect most children from exposure to tobacco smoke. Therefore, the Health Ministry's approach, which opposes protection for individuals from smoke incursion into their own homes in order to protect the smokers' children, does not protect the children of smokers, and in addition it can cause substantial harm to neighbors and the children of neighbors. We ask the Health Ministry to reconsider its stand in light of these findings.

"The State of Israel must make the reduction of parental [smoking](#) a national goal and invest the appropriate resources in this issue. Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions regarding when and how the exposure occurs. Eighty-five percent of tobacco smoke is invisible and our sense of smell is not reliable, so many parents mistakenly believe that they are protecting their children while in fact they are exposing them to substantial health risks. As a society, we must safeguard citizens and distance everyone from the risks of [tobacco smoke](#) exposure, especially infants and [children](#), pregnant women, and all vulnerable populations."

More information: Laura J. Rosen et al, Tobacco Smoke Exposure According to Location of Home Smoking in Israel: Findings from the Project Zero Exposure Study, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20043523](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043523)

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