

Passive smoking in our homes and cars remains major hazard to the health of our children

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Parents need to be better informed about the risks to their children of passive smoking according to a report from the Royal College of Physicians and backed by the UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies (UKCTCS).

Despite England going smoke-free in public places in July 2007 and the vast majority of the public believing this has helped the nation's health, there remains no legislation in place to protect [children](#) in their own homes, despite 80 per cent of children knowing that passive smoke is harmful to them.

The report found that two million UK children live in houses where they are exposed to second-hand smoke and that 300,000 children visit their GP and 9,500 are admitted to hospital every year as a result.

Second-hand smoke causes 22,600 new cases of asthma, 20,000 new cases of respiratory tract infection and 121,000 new cases of middle ear disease in children are reported each year.

The report also found that living in a household where one or more parents smokes more than doubles the risk of cot death and doubles the risk

of meningitis.

The University of Bath's Dr Anna Gilmore, who is a member of the UK Centre for [Tobacco Control Studies](#) (UKCTCS), and contributed to the report, said: "While the majority of parents do all they can to protect their children by not smoking in their homes and cars, there remains a significant number who do not take such precautions.

"This is particularly worrying as children are far more vulnerable to the effects of second-hand smoke due to their smaller lungs and still developing immune systems."

Second-hand smoke exposure is also a financial burden to the NHS with visits to GPs and hospital admissions costing in excess of £23 million each year.

In addition to acquired diseases, the report also details the resulting behaviours that children living in smoking households take with them into adult life, finding that children with parents who smoke are 90 per cent more likely to smoke themselves.

23,000 young people a year in England who are exposed to second-hand smoke in the home, start smoking by the time they are 15.

Professor John Britton, also from the UKCTCS, said: "[Passive smoking](#) is causing all sorts of diseases in our children which are completely avoidable and we need to take measures now.

"A concerted media campaign explaining the risks would be a good start," he added, "people won't change their behaviours just because we tell them to, they have to understand why we are saying it and what they need to do to protect their children."

Provided by University of Bath

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