Children from lower-socioeconomic area more likely to be exposed to smoke in cars

December 8 2011

(Medical Xpress) -- Children from a lower socio-economic area in Wellington, Wainuiomata, are 11 times more likely to be exposed to cigarette smoking in cars than in the wealthier suburb of Karori, according to recent research.

Researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington, observed almost 150,000 cars in Karori and Wainuiomata, during February to April this year. They compared the prevalence of smoking and exposure to smoking between the two suburbs.

The results have been published in the journal *Tobacco Control*, and are the first ever to show the differences between two areas for smoking in cars with children.

The study found that the overall prevalence of smoking in cars, and the exposure to smoking, for both adults and children were much greater in Wainuiomata than Karori.

The study also found that differences between the two areas have widened since 2005, when a similar study was conducted. Smoking in cars with other passengers reduced at double the rate in Kaori compared to in Wainuiomata.

“While there’s been some reduction in smoking in cars in both areas, the reduction has been much faster in Karori,” says one of the study authors, Dr George Thomson.

“The results suggest that the current educational approach to smoking in cars isn’t working well for children in poorer areas. It raises the question whether New Zealand should catch up with other jurisdictions in Australia, Canada and the USA by requiring vehicles, particularly those with children, to be smokefree,” he says.

Both the public and New Zealand smokers strongly support protecting children from smoking in cars. Tobacco smoke pollution is significantly increased inside vehicles, even when the windows are down. Because of the confined space, and because children are particularly susceptible to the pollution effects, there can be a significant health risk.

Recent survey evidence indicates that over 80% of smokers agree with the statement, ‘that smoking should not be allowed in cars with children under the age of 14 in them.’

The research was funded by the Cancer Society of New Zealand.

Provided by University of Otago

Citation: Children from lower-socioeconomic area more likely to be exposed to smoke in cars (2011, December 8) retrieved 23 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-12-children-lower-socioeconomic-area-exposed-cars.html

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