

Single parents more likely to allow cigarette smoking in the home than two-parent families

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Are you a single parent? Do you allow smoking inside your home?

You're not alone, according to a new study by Canadian and American

public-health researchers. Single parents are less likely to butt out, ban cigarette [smoking](#) and keep the home smoke-free than [two-parent families](#), they say.

It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor or live in a fancy neighborhood or a tough one; if you're a smoker raising [children](#) on your own, they have a higher chance of living in an environment of second- and third-hand smoke.

"In Canada, the home has become the primary locale in which children are exposed to [tobacco smoke](#)," according to the study published in December in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (CJPH).

"Single parents are 40 percent less likely than two-parent families to ban smoking at home, regardless of economic level," the researchers write, "but the extent to which this relates to economic inequalities across family structures is unclear."

Tobacco control expert Annie Montreuil of the Institut national de santé publique du Québec wrote the study, with Jennifer O'Loughlin of Université de Montréal's School of Public Health and Robert Wellman of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

'Not just financial strains'

Protecting their kids from [second-hand smoke](#) may be just as top-of-mind for single parents as dual parents, said O'Loughlin. But something about their situation raising kids on their own deters many from keeping their home totally smoke-free, she added.

"What we found is that it's not just the financial strains associated with single parenthood that are the issue, it can be a multitude of other factors like whether they have proper support," said O'Loughlin.

What exactly stops these smokers from making sure not to light up around their kids at home—and getting others to do the same? According to the researchers, those raising a child alone might:

- have higher stress levels related to lone parenting
- have difficulty coping with the challenges of implementing smoke-free rules
- believe that not smoking when the kids are home is enough to protect them from the dangers of second-hand smoke

"Some single parents may be forced to choose between leaving a child unattended—or bringing the child outside each time they smoke—and exposing them to second-hand smoke inside," Montreuil said. "Without a supportive partner, single parents may also be reluctant to insist that friends and family not smoke in the home."

Third-hand smoke on toys

Then there's the issue of third-hand smoke: the residue that clings to clothes and furniture and children's toys if a parent smokes at home, whether their child is present at the time or not.

"Some single parents with shared custody may smoke inside the home only when their children are absent," the authors point out. "Although this protects against second-hand smoke, it does not prevent exposure to third-hand smoke residue."

On a positive note, the study also found that parents of the youngest children (infants and preschoolers) were more likely than parents of school-age children to not smoke in the home.

But while "parents of preschoolers are seemingly aware of the hazards of second-hand smoke and take action to protect [younger children](#), parents

of older children may believe [incorrectly] that exposure is not as risky as children age."

Data from 2015 study

Data for the study were drawn from an earlier study that Montreuil published in the CJPB in 2015 that asked 754 daily smokers in Quebec whether they smoked in the car with children present. The new study segmented out 567 who said they lived with one or more children; 122 were single parents and 445 said they were in a couple.

Only 27 percent of single parents said their home was smoke-free, compared to 56 percent of those living in couples. Even after accounting for indicators of economic disadvantage, single parents were 40 percent less likely to live in smoke-free homes.

What to do? Support single parents better, the researchers advocate.

"Single [parents](#) may need targeted intervention to encourage and support them to implement smoke-free homes," they argue. "These interventions should focus on their specific needs, including stress management and support for smoking abstinence inside the home."

More information: Annie Montreuil et al. Single-parent status and smoke-free home rules among daily smokers, *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.17269/s41997-019-00274-5](https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-019-00274-5)

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