Fewer under-fives admitted to hospital during 'take it outside' smoking campaign

September 2 2020

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The number of under-five-year-olds admitted to hospital with asthma related complaints dropped following the Take it Right Outside campaign in Scotland, researchers have found.

Take it Right Outside was a national mass media initiative launched in 2014 encouraging smokers to smoke cigarettes outside their own home to protect children and other family members from second-hand smoke.

The study by staff at the Universities of Aberdeen, Stirling and Glasgow, which has been published in *The Lancet Public Health*, looked at data from all hospital admissions in Scotland (2000-2018) for all those aged 16 and under.

Many children remain exposed to second-hand smoke and this places them at increased risk of asthma and other respiratory conditions.

The Aberdeen study found that after the campaign there was a drop in hospital admissions for under five-year-olds for asthma of around 25% between 2014-2018.

The same reduction was not observed in children aged older than five years old—something that could be attributed to those age groups spending less time in the home and perhaps in less close contact with a parent who may smoke.

While the study did not measure asthma symptoms which did not require admission to hospital, the researchers say it is reasonable to expect that hundreds of young children have benefitted from less asthma symptoms after Take it Right Outside.

The Scottish Government implemented a ban on smoking in public places in 2006.

The study also showed that, independent of the Take It Right Outside campaign, the number of asthma related admissions to hospital continues to reduce for children of all ages since the 2006 smoking ban, and particularly those among the most deprived quintile. Over the 19-year

study period there were 740,055 admissions, including 518, 341 children aged under five and 202,446 children of all ages living in communities in the quintile with greatest deprivation.

The study was funded by the University of Aberdeen REF 2021 Impact Support Award Scheme.

Professor Steve Turner, a consultant paediatrician at the University of Aberdeen and NHS Grampian, said: "Work done in 2012 showed that the 2006 ban on smoking in public places had led to a cut in asthma admissions in children. What this latest research does is to show that the subsequent Take it Right Outside campaign was also followed by a fall in asthma admissions for children under five. The research also shows that the 2006 ban continues to be linked to better child health.

"We believe that parents who smoke have taken on board the message of Take it Right Outside campaign and created a smoke free bubble around their children. Parents who smoke often find it hard to quit but we know from other work we and others have done that they can change their smoking behaviour, e.g. smoke less, create a smoke free house.

"This study shows there was a fall in asthma admissions among children aged under five relative to the underlying trend after TiRO was launched. Whilst we cannot say conclusively that one is a direct result of the other, the figures are encouraging and suggests that public health mass media campaigns that compliment broader changes in legislation can make a difference."

More information: Steve Turner et al. Associations between a smoke-free homes intervention and childhood admissions to hospital in Scotland: an interrupted time-series analysis of whole-population data, *The Lancet Public Health* (2020). DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30178-X

Provided by University of Aberdeen

Citation: Fewer under-fives admitted to hospital during 'take it outside' smoking campaign (2020, September 2) retrieved 25 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-under-fives-hospital-campaign.html

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