



Smoke-free environments make sense

Issue brief

For more information, contact Fight Asthma Milwaukee Allies at (414) 390-2179.

Purpose

This issue brief outlines the importance of smoke-free environments in relation to the asthma epidemic the city of Milwaukee faces. It is Fight Asthma Milwaukee Allies' intention to raise awareness, educate and inform the public as well as community leaders about the impact environmental tobacco smoke has on those suffering from asthma.

Situation

In the report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*, the U.S. Surgeon General calls for smoke-free policies and regulations as the most effective way to protect everyone's right to breathe clean air.

- The report states that secondhand smoke exposure can cause disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke.
- The scientific evidence indicates there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke and the elimination of smoking in indoor spaces will fully protect nonsmokers from exposure to secondhand smoke. Separating smokers from nonsmokers, cleaning the air and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposures of nonsmokers to secondhand smoke.
- Between 2000 and 2004, approximately 800 deaths were associated with secondhand smoke annually in the state of Wisconsin – comparable to the toll from motor vehicle crashes each year.
- Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, acute respiratory infections, ear problems and more severe asthma. Parents who smoke may cause their children to have respiratory symptoms and slower lung growth.
- About 211,000 youth in Wisconsin are exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes.

Background

Because smoking prevalence among Medicaid recipients is approximately 39 percent greater than the prevalence in the overall U.S. population, Medicaid recipients are disproportionately affected by tobacco-related diseases.

- Asthma is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases in the U.S.
- Asthma caused 14.7 million missed school days last year.
- The annual estimated cost - including medical expenses, lost work and missed school days - for Milwaukee children with asthma is \$10 million.
- There are 30,000 children with asthma in Milwaukee County.
- Asthma is the No. 1 cause of hospital stays at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin.

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Assessment

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey, developed by the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, interviewed students between ages 13 and 15 in 132 countries between 1999 and 2005 and found 76 percent favored smoke-free environments.

In July 2007, the 146 parties to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control decided unanimously to support 100 percent smoke-free public places and workplaces. The Framework Convention has become the most widely embraced treaty in the history of the United Nations. Twenty-two states have enacted smoke-free laws. Cities such as New York, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul and Los Angeles embrace smoke-free environments. Wisconsin cities such as Madison and Appleton embrace smoke-free environments as well.

Recommendations

Forty-nine million dollars per year in medical costs would be saved nationwide with smoke-free environments. That is one reason why leading public health organizations in Wisconsin support smoke-free workplaces. Keep your car and home smoke-free. Support smoke-free laws. Talk to your legislators and representatives. To stop smoking, call the Wisconsin Quitline at (800) 358-9295.

References:

1. The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General, June 27, 2006: www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/secondhandsmoke/
2. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
3. Ahrens D, Anderson K, Jovaag A, Kuo D, and Palersheim K. Exposure to Secondhand Smoke in Wisconsin Homes. Madison, Wisconsin: Paul C. Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center, Tobacco Surveillance and Evaluation Program, 2007: http://www.medsch.wisc.edu/mep/departments/documents/fs_documents.html

For more information:

1. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/tobacco
2. World Health Organization Tobacco Free Initiative: www.who.int/tobacco/research/economics/publications/mdg_book/en/index.html
3. American Lung Association: www.lungusa.org

Fight Asthma Milwaukee Allies is the longest standing asthma coalition in Wisconsin. Located at Children's Health Education Center in Milwaukee, the coalition's mission is to work together with children and families, connecting them to caring people, reducing hospital stays and supporting healthy lives. For more information, visit www.famallies.org.

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