VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Asthma and Smoking

Reducing the Burden of Asthma in Vermont

September 2013

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways of the lungs and makes breathing difficult. During an asthma attack, the lungs fill with mucus, the airways swell, and the muscles around the airways tighten.

Impact of smoke

When someone with asthma smokes, it irritates the lungs even more, and can cause:

- more breathing problems, including coughing and wheezing
- increased frequency and severity of asthma attacks
- more problems controlling asthma symptoms
- greater susceptibility to illnesses, such as colds, bronchitis and pneumonia
- an increased risk of miscarriage, low birth weight, and sudden unexpected infant death (SUID)
- premature, preventable death

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is the smoke that is breathed in when you are near someone who is smoking a cigarette, pipe or cigar.

Smoking and secondhand smoke are common asthma triggers. Secondhand smoke can even cause asthma in children who have never experienced symptoms. Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at higher risk of developing more severe asthma.

Secondhand smoke can worsen chronic respiratory conditions, trigger asthma episodes, and increase the severity of attacks.

Designated smoke-free zones are created for the safety of everyone.

Asthma & Smoking Facts

If you smoke and have asthma, you...

- are increasing your risk of an asthma attack
- could be permanently damaging your airways
- could be blocking the benefit of your asthma medicines
- might be increasing your chances of dying early

What can I do?

Minimizing your exposure to tobacco smoke can help you manage your asthma symptoms.

- Do not smoke or allow others to smoke in your home or car.
- Keep yourself and children away from areas where smoking is allowed.
- If you are around smokers, ask them to stop or not to smoke near you.
- When smoking, cover your clothes with a shirt or jacket to soak up the secondhand smoke. Also, wash your hands, hair and face. Change your clothing after you smoke to remove the harmful chemicals from your skin.

Make a Plan!

Having an Asthma Action Plan can help you manage an attack caused by smoking or when you encounter secondhand smoke.
(Download one from the Vermont Asthma Program website at www.healthvermont.gov/asthma)

Quitting smoking will help decrease your asthma symptoms. Within three months your lung function improves.

And the sooner you quit, the better. Create a Quit Plan. Get help and support from family, friends, and the Vermont Quit Network. Visit www.VTQuitNetwork.org or call 1-800-QUITNOW.