

14 ways you can help prevent cancer

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Recommendation 2 for Policy-makers on Second-hand smoke

- **Enforce legislation to eliminate exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke in all indoor workplaces, public places, and transportation.**
- **Extend smoke-free laws to outdoor public places, in particular health-care centres and areas where children and adolescents could be exposed, such as educational settings and playgrounds.**
- **Extend smoke-free legislation to include all novel tobacco and nicotine-containing products.**
- **Complementing the above policy measures, implement regular smoke-free environment campaigns in private settings, such as homes and vehicles, and regular public health campaigns to raise awareness of the effects of exposure to second-hand smoke on health and the risk of cancer.**

Executive summary

In 2021, exposure to second-hand smoke resulted in 53 000 deaths in the European Union (EU); almost 9000 of these were due to cancer. Exposure to second-hand smoke in children aged 13–15 years decreased from 2002 to 2017, but the prevalence remains high in some EU Member States.

Second-hand smoke is defined as the mixture of the smoke that is exhaled by the active smoker (mainstream smoke), the smoke that is emitted by the cigarette between puffs (side stream smoke), and other contaminants. In addition to increasing risk of cancer, exposure to second-hand smoke poses other health risks, such as the risk of low-birth-weight babies when pregnant women are exposed to second-hand smoke. Babies and children exposed to second-hand smoke are at higher risk of respiratory and ear conditions and infections and cot death. Exposure to second-hand smoke at home might be a significant barrier to smoking cessation in patients with cancer types that are not traditionally perceived to be related to tobacco. Therefore, preventing exposure to second-hand smoke will also reduce these health risks.

Government action on reducing exposure to second-hand smoke, especially for children and adolescents, has focused mainly on extending smoke-free laws in most public places. Integrated approaches to enforcing the implementation of these laws, including extending them to indoor workplaces and public transportation, to reduce the cancer risk and burden associated with second-hand smoke exposure are particularly important. This policy brief describes international policies and guidelines that support policy-makers and other stakeholders to implement the European Code Against Cancer, 5th edition (ECAC5) policy recommendation to address the cancer burden caused by exposure to second-hand smoke.

Key policy actions to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke

- **Enforce legislation to eliminate exposure to second-hand smoke.**
 - Ensure that all indoor public places, including bars, restaurants, and workplaces and public transportation, without exemptions. A standard control framework should be established to impose penalties and ensure consistent enforcement.
- **Extend smoke-free laws to outdoor public places, and to include all novel tobacco and nicotine-containing products.**
 - Outdoor public spaces, such as parks, schools, playgrounds, and hospital grounds, should be smoke-free zones, and regular monitoring should take place to achieve maximum compliance. All working areas, including outdoor working places, should be smoke-free zones.

- **Implement smoke-free environment campaigns in private settings, such as homes and vehicles, and public health campaigns.**
 - Launch public health campaigns to raise awareness about the health risks associated with exposure to second-hand smoke. These should include mass media outreach, social media campaigns, and interactive events. Campaigns should also focus their messaging on groups at high risk and vulnerable populations.

Risk of cancer

- Exposure to second-hand smoke is a well-established cause of cancer. Tobacco smoke contains more than 5000 chemicals, and some of these are known carcinogens.
- Exposure to second-hand smoke (particularly over prolonged periods) can cause lung cancer in people who have never smoked, and may also increase the risk of some other types of cancer, such as breast, cervical, and head and neck cancers.



References

Council Recommendation (2024) on smoke- and aerosol-free environments

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